CONSTRUCTIONS OF ABSENTEE FATHERHOOD AMONGST BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN MEN

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I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore constructions of absent fatherhood amongst Black South African men, as well as the factors that contribute to these constructions. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Black men between the ages of 25-50, who had not had contact with their children since infancy.

Absent fatherhood in South Africa has been highlighted in the literature, however, most studies have been conducted from the perspectives of the mother and children, with a focus most often on the effects of absent fatherhood on the child. It was thus significant to explore absent fatherhood from the fathers' perspectives, in order to understand their experiences. The interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative thematic analysis. Constructions of fatherhood included notions of father as provider, symbol of strength and source of wisdom and guidance. Fathers were seen as powerful figures, connected to culture and tradition. Given that all the participants had experienced their own fathers as absent, it was significant to note maternal influences on their constructions of fatherhood. Constructions of absentee fatherhood included notions of powerlessness due to financial and cultural expectations and a lack of control over decision making. Absent fathers were also frequently constructed as victims. A number of historical and current contextual influences were identified in absent fatherhood, such as unplanned pregnancies and a lack of readiness for fatherhood. Many of the participants reported negative childhood experiences with their own fathers, racial and socio-economic influences on fatherhood were identified. Powerlessness with regards to the Justice system was highlighted, as well as the influence of maternal gate-keeping.

It was concluded that South Africa's traumatic history is implicated in the issue of often intergenerationally transmitted absent fatherhood amongst Black men. The maternal, familial and cultural structures that have developed to accommodate absent fatherhood may in fact be perpetuating the problem Black men appear to be feeling too powerless to take on a role that they perceive to be powerful and may need more facilitation when it comes to transitioning into fatherhood. It may be worthwhile to reconsider cultural and other socio-economic structures that can assist with contextual issues that black South African men are faced with.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion of absentee fatherhood is one that is beginning to occur more in academic forums (Garfinkel, McLanahan, Meyer, & Seltzer, 1998; Lamb, 2004). This topic is of interest to those who would like not only to understand the reasons behind it, but to also attempt to reduce the number of absent fathers in South Africa. South Africa's population being majority Black people, the number of absentee fathers in this community is the highest Khunuou, 2006; Ratele, 2012). However, there are other contributing factors to these high numbers, many of which are explored in this study, which aimed to investigate Black men's constructions and experiences of fatherhood particularly absent fatherhood.

1.1.Aims of the study

This research aims to explore constructions of absentee fatherhood amongst Black South African men who have no contact with their children. The study wishes to explore the meanings that men who are absent fathers make of their not having had contact with their children despite knowledge of paternity, and their understandings of fatherhood in relation to this.

1.2.Description of the study

This research explores the constructions of absentee fatherhood amongst Black South African men and approaches the topic of fathering from a perspective that acknowledges the roles of intrapsychic factors and culture and context in constructions of parenthood, sometimes in ways that may influence fathers' decisions not to be present in the lives of their children. The literature review includes definitions of fatherhood and absentee fatherhood and explores the social influences on these particular constructions, as well as how Black men's experiences of absent fatherhood, in turn, contributes to the perpetuation of various constructions. The aim was to research their views on how they thought Black men become absent fathers and what they felt led to the absenteeism. The methodology used was qualitative and used individual semi-structured interviews. The sample consisted of five Black men between the ages of 25-50, who did not had contact with their children after infancy. The collected data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative six step thematic analysis to analyse the five themes.

1.3. Rationale

Not much is known about fathering from the perspectives of men and the processes they undergo when transitioning into parenthood (Easterbrooks et al., 2007; Madhavan, Richter & Gross, 2015). The bulk of research focuses on the perspectives of mothers and their transition into motherhood, and children's perspectives on their upbringings and the effects of this (Madhavan et al., 2015). In the case of absent fathers, research has explored the effects of father absence on children, but there has been less research exploring the absent father's perspective (Gadsden, Wortham & Turner, 2003; Madhavan et al., 2015;Mavungu, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013).Furthermore, little research on this topic has been conducted using a psychoanalytic framework that is in-depth and has the potential to capture underlying motivations and intra-psychic conflicts (Lamb, 2000; Liebman & Abell, 2000).For the above reasons, it would be beneficial to attempt to explore these men's psychosocial constructions of fatherhood in order to fill the gaps that currently exist in literature, with a particular focus on factors that play a role in absent father outcomes.

There is a significant need to allow absent fathers a voice. Up until now, the literature that is available that attempts to explore the topic of absent fathers, takes its information from single mothers and children who have grown up without their fathers, which has led to a lot of speaking on behalf of these men (Easterbrooks et al., 2007). A focus on topics like the behavioural problems that result from fathers not being present in their children's lives, has constructed father absence as responsible for a number of social ills(Freeman, 2008).However, it is also important to understand these fathers reasons for not being present (Easterbrooks et al., 2007).Though it may be difficult to explore this issue from the father's perspective, perhaps due to access to this sample, not attempting to access their views and settling for opinions from anywhere else other than directly from these father's themselves is no longer sufficient

Research does speak about the significance the father carries in the child's life (Easterbrooks et al., 2007), yet the lack of research that involves the father contradicts this. Effective psychosocial intervention for fathers, the children and family, could be informed by this kind of research. Understanding the experiences of absent fathers, could assist in effort to lessen the high statistics of single headed households in South Africa, or alternatively help to shift pathologising constructions of these fathers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

There has been extensive research conducted with regards to the structure of a family, what a family should look like and which individuals play particular significant roles (Perry, 2009). Within this, there has been a widespread amount of research carried out with regards to the impact that fathers specifically have on the development of children, insofar as they are present or not(Khunuou, 2006;Mavungu et al., 2013;Ratele, 2012). Very little research especially relevant to the South African context has been conducted, even less so for Black males (Ratele, 2012). A larger number of studies that can be found on fatherhood and parenting are from the viewpoint of mothers and children. Of this, not a great deal really represents fathers (Ratele, 2012).Very little has been written about men that are not active in their children's lives to understand why this is. Madhavan et al. (2015) notes that there are discrepancies in reliability when collecting information on father involvement, as well as gender discrepancies in how households are run and what the expectations of fathers are. Khunuou (2006) acknowledges fathers, who despite their father-mother relationship status, wish to be present in their children's lives. Her study highlights how, amongst other issues, problems with courts of law and inability to comply with maintenance requirements may prevent this from happening.

In South Africa, as well as internationally, family life has fallen under pressure, and fathers are defaulting on their parental roles (Haung, 2006; Mavungu et al., 2013; Ratele, 2012). According to Statistics South Africa (2010) there has been an increase in the numbers of children whose caretakers are not their biological parents, particularly their biological fathers, in the past two decades (Haung, 2006; Mavungu et al., 2013; Ratele, 2012). Approximately four million children are estimated to be orphans and of those four million children, at least half of them are paternal orphans (Ratele, 2012; Stats SA', 2010). This is reiterated by the common trends found worldwide such as in The United States where it has been marked that African American families are the most disrupted and have the highest numbers of single mother headed households (Khunuou, 2006; Mavungu et al., 2013; Ratele, 2012). This may point to both cultural and contextual factors playing a role.

Johnson, Levine and Doolittle, (1999) found that non-present fathers stated that they felt that there was a major difference between a White and African Americans with regards to participation in mainstream economy. Johnson et al. (1999) found that Black Americans had

fewer contacts they knew who had succeeded in the mainstream economy (Johnson et al., 1999) and note differences in employment and assets in comparison to other racial groups. Hofferth's (2000) study addresses the impact that the location which different racial groups live has on fathering. This was connected to the general quality of the region and its race or ethnic composition (Hofferth, 2000). Hofferth's (2000) study suggested that parenting may differ in an ethnically homogeneous neighbourhood than one that consists of minorities. There is the perception that these communities are able to sustain ethnic traditions and preserve a sense of community and pride which fosters greater familial involvement by fathers (Hofferth's, 2000).

2.2. Fatherhood as personally and socially constructed

In order to explore this topic, fatherhood needs definition. There are differing definitions of fathering, such as: "the biological act whereby a man's sperm results in the birth of a child" (Hunter, 2006, p.99),as opposed to fatherhood defined by the social role associated with the care of a child (Hunter, 2006). It is the Western view and understanding, that a man becomes a father when he impregnates a woman, which means that the only criterion to fatherhood is biological (Morrell, 2006). Anthropological writings in this area locally state that the man who gives his sperm is not considered important in the child or the mother's life (Morrell, 2006). In South African culture it is believed that fatherhood has more associations with familial affiliation than medically determined paternity (Langa, 2010; Morrell, 2006; Perry, 2009). Morrell (2006) goes on to differentiate fathers as either economic fathers who contribute to the maintenance involved in raising the child, or communal fathers who reside with or are responsible for raising a child that may also not be their biological child.

Next, the concept of the absent father needs definition. Morrell (2006)and Padi, Nduna, Khunuou and Khlopane (2014) believe that there is a problem with the absent father definitions that currently exist. It is not a simplistic term that can be reduced to being physically absent or physically present, as a father may be physically present but emotionally absent or physically absent but emotionally supportive (Morrell, 2006; Padi et al., 2014). Morrell (2006) states that one of the reasons that fathers do not assume their fatherhood responsibilities is due to having no access to resources, as poverty is one of the most significant factors that undermine the responsibilities of fatherhood and fathers ability to be involved parents. Many men feel incapable to meet what they believe to be their responsibility and thus flee their fatherhood role. Silberschimdt (2001) points out that very

few endeveavors have been made to research and explore the impact that socioeconomic changes have had on men's lives, and how men are dealing with the situation. Silberschimdt (2001) suggests that men are acting out in violent ways or even passively as absent fathers due to their disempowerment.

Links between feelings of disempowerment and dysfunctional forms of fatherhood have been most explored in relation to domestically violent fathers. This literature has highlighted these fathers' positioning of themselves as victims of their circumstances. Deslauriers, Devault, Groulx and Sevigny (2012) found that many of these fathers felt that they were victims that experienced discrimination, while feeling condemned by social bodies such as the legal system and social services organizations designed for families. This study further found that these fathers felt that people had a perception that they were immature and unable to assume their responsibilities as parents (Deslauriers et al., 2012). Deslauriers et al. (2012) speaks about how judgements came from their families stating: "Even my parents, they sent my sister home with me because they did not think I was capable of looking after my son." (p. 74). Judgments related to their income were also noted: "You can have absolutely no job, be on assistance, and still be the best parent in the world" (p. 74.). Deslauriers et al. (2012) describes how fathers felt that it was far simpler for mothers than it was for fathers to get support to handle their various challenges.

In a domestic violence study that investigated why men were violent towards their partners and children, Featherstone and Peckerover (2007) speak about fathers that described feeling that they were predominantly viewed as financial providers. These men did not feel that much attention or acknowledgment was given with regards to their potential to add to the family in other significant ways. This meant that men felt that they were victims of a system that did not support them as parental figures that could offer more than financial contribution. Featherstone and Peckerover (2007) address tensions involving romantic partners, household duties and childcare that made fathers bitter for feeling responsible for more than they should be, which provoked violent behaviour. Some men felt that their children were to blame for their abusive behaviour, for example, such as when they did not meet their father's expectation with regards to certain behaviour like completing their homework, going to sleep and so on (Featherstone & Peckerover , 2007). This suggests that many of these fathers viewed themselves as victims of provocation from their partners and children. Bancroft (1998) and Zosky (2003) suggest that abusive fathers often perceive themselves as being victims, which may be linked to Fonagy's (1999) assertion that some violent men

demonstrate a lack of a sense of agency and may therefore feel a sense of reduced responsibility for their own violent actions, perhaps supporting views of the self as a victim.

Hill, Rubin and Peplau (1976) note how romantic relationships that end are seldom due to men wanting them to. Women had a higher likelihood than men to perceive problems in premarital relationships and more likely to be the ones to suggest the breakups (Peplau, 1976).Some fathers in the Featherstone and Peckerover (2007) study were aware that their actions weren't always provoked which suggested that they were unaware of the need to focus on the child's needs and understand the child's point of view. Many of these fathers wanted contact with their children as they viewed their children as being able to provide them with 'unconditional love' (Featherstone & Peckerover, 2007). It has yet to be explored whether absent fathers construct their roles in ways similar or not. Settersten and Cancel-Tirado (2010) speak about how an awareness of the possible negative effects of absent fatherhood, such as scarce opportunities for professional progression or the finishing of school, might influence men's decisions in this regard. However, it also needs to be considered that some men might not feel ready for fatherhood or may view it as impinging on their growth.

Broader, societal constructions of fatherhood and their effects on absent fatherhood have also been explored in the literature (Hamer, 1998; Manning, Stewart & Smick, 2003; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). In South Africa, laws that compel men to meet their financial obligations to their children have been found to exacerbate the high numbers of absent fathers (Khunuou, 2006; Mavungu et al., 2013;Morrell, 2006). If men are struggling financially, these laws disempower fathers further with regards to other forms of involvement, as they reiterate the provider role (Edin, Tach, and Mincy, 2009; Khunuou, 2006; Mavungu et al., 2013; Roy, 1999). Low income fathers who cannot make their child support payments experience their self-worth being undermined (Khunuou, 2006; Mavungu et al., 2013). This low self-esteem and feeling unneeded is also addressed in studies that found that fathers did not feel they were necessary in raising their children as a result of their disempowerment (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; Devault et al., 2008; Lamb 1997; Townsend 2000). This, in turn, influences their abilities to fulfil other aspects of the fathering role (Roy, 1999; Settersten & Cancel-Tirado, 2010; Tach et al., 2009). It is only recently that new policies that attempt to develop relationships between fathers and children have been advocated (Morrell, 2006). The norm for law courts is to award custody to mothers which have in turn had critical effects on the relationships fathers have with their children, as once

again for unemployed men, money and resources are scarce (Morrell, 2006). It would be beneficial to rethink social policies with regards to fathers and their involvement with their children.

According to Padi, Nduna, Khunou and Kholopane (2014), a man can be absent in three ways: as an unknown father, which is when the child has no knowledge or recollection of their father, possibly due to them being young when their father left. Second, a father can be absent from a child's life fully, partially, economically or emotionally (Mavungu et al., 2013; Padi et al., 2014). This paternal non-involvement means that the father may be involved in the child's life in some way or another but not in all aspects, including residing or not residing with the child (Mavungu et al., 2013; Padi et al., 2014). Lastly, there is what Mavungu et al. (2013) and Padi et al. (2014) call an undisclosed father which is when a father is not present due to the mother deliberately not disclosing to the child who their father is or giving them the incorrect information. While these definitions tend to define fatherhood from the perspectives of mothers and children, this research will focus on defining absence from the father's perspective-when the father himself is aware of paternity, but chooses to be fully absent from his child's life. There are multi-faceted connections between culture, finance and fatherhood with regards to men not being present in their children's lives. However, it should also be noted that this literature could take on a fuller exploration of African men who are financially stable and how this may or may not affect their presence or absence with regards to fatherhood. Due to the lack of literature and minimal commentary of the latter argument there is an over-reliance on the former factors.

This research will be taking a psychosocial approach to understandings constructions of fatherhood. While attention will be paid to the intrapsychic processes involved in each participant's understandings of fatherhood, this research will also view fatherhood as a social process. Fatherhood does not occur from nothingness says Mkhize (2006). It is a socially moralistic process that is informed by influential communications of what society deems is involved in being a man (Mavungu et al., 2013; Mkhize, 2006; Perry, 2009). Mkhize (2006) goes on to say that traditional conceptions of how identity is created, that focus on intra-psychic processes (progressive processes from within a person), can hamper acknowledging fatherhood as a process that is social, moralistic and relational. It can also be useful to understand fatherhood within socio-cultural psychological belief systems which conceptualise identity within social, historical, political and ideological terms (Mavungu et al., 2013; Mkhize, 2006; Perry, 2009). There is also a gender based viewpoint which

understands fatherhood as socially constructed rather than innate, meaning that fatherhood is connected to social creation and reproduction of masculinities (Mavungu et al., 2013; Mkhize, 2006; Perry, 2009).

In research that was conducted in Kwa-Zulu Natal with isiZulu speaking men, there were quite a number of men that felt powerless when it came to the subject of fatherhood. Some expressed the term "AnginawoAmandla" -I don't have power (Hunter, 2006, p.99) which was used to indicate their feelings of social weakness when it came to the issue of their inability to pay 'ilobolo' – Bride wealth (Hunter, 2006; Makusha & Richter, 2015). A man who is unable to pay 'ilobolo' and get married, is viewed as having failed to 'ukwakhaumuzi'- to build a homestead (Hunter, 2006; Makusha & Richter, 2015). This alerts one to the difficulties involved for black men to be able to play active roles in their families and have access to certain privileges that men in western cultures automatically receive. Those who blame these men as irresponsible for not supporting their children fail to see that these men function within a particular socio-historical context (Langa, 2010; Ratele, 2012).

Other factors that are connected to the context within which fatherhood occurs has to do with the often complex relationship the father has with the mother as well as the man's family of origin (Easterbrooks et al., 2007; Makusha & Richter, 2015). Bryan (2013) and Easterbrooks et al.(2007) state that the father-mother rapport is specifically significant in order for men to make the changeover into fatherhood. Bryan (2013), Dienhart and Daly, 1997 and Easterbrooks et al. (2007) believe that a close father-mother relationship is a key factor in supporting fathers. It provides the emotional backdrop and informational fuel needed to undertake thoughtful parenting (Easterbrooks et al., 2007). The reasons for this claim are that mothers have the potential to behave like "gate-keepers" by manipulating the fathers permission to spend time with their children or divulging certain information about them (Easterbrooks et al., 2007; Makusha & Richter, 2015; Manyatshe & Nduna, 2014;Nathane-Taulela & Nduna, 2014). The term "gate-keepers" was first utilized by (Easterbrooks et al., 2007; Makusha & Richter, 2015; Manyatshe & Nduna, 2014; Nathane-Taulela & Nduna, 2014) and will be referred to throughout the study.

According to Manyatshe and Nduna (2014), one of the ways "gate-keeping" may occur is by failing to disclose the identity of the father where the child is not told who their father is, or mothers may or may not know who the father is, and are unaware that the person is their child's father. Men's struggle to be emotionally available when they encounter economic

difficulties could be the motivation behind gate closing to protect the child from potential let-down by the father (Makusha & Richter, 2015).Marital support has also been identified as assisting men to be fathers. They are thought to benefit from the information they may from mothers, as there are fewer practice and socialization options for parenting amongst men (Bryan, 2013; Easterbrooks et al., 2007). Another issue according to Settersten and Cancel-Tirado (2010) is that of remarrying and living together, which has brought non-biological children into father's lives, which can complicate the relationship with their biological children.

While the factors above all influence constructions of fatherhood, it is also important to explore how identity construction occurs. Identity creation can involve assimilating readily accessible models as well as generating new models, which means that men who are often disconnected from their father's experiences may choose features of exemplary behaviour from a number of known parental influences as they changeover into fatherhood (Roy, 2006).Meanings of fatherhood are absorbed and adopted and stories that connect intergenerational experiences are emergent co-accounts that form the process of identity formation for fathers (Roy, 2006). These narratives require the assimilation of past, present and anticipated future men's stories that shape who they become as fathers (Roy, 2006).

Ratele (2012) writes about men who speak about how their constructions of fatherhood were influenced by the quality of relationship they had with their own fathers. They described good fathering as him "being there for me" which shows that a sense of caring presence was valued more than the biological father actually being physically available- quality over quantity (Ratele, 2012). "My father meant a lot to me in the sense he was always *there for me*- (Siyabonga)" (Ratele, 2012, p.557)."My father, I could say he was always *there for me*, always stood up for me, taught me a lot of things, spent quality time with me … and you name it, I mean just taught me a lot of things which I still treasure today and which I'm trying to pass on to my son-(John)"(Ratele, 2012, p.558).With the high rates of fathers that are absent in South Africa, this model is rarely passed on to men and thus an intergenerational transmission of absenteeism is created.

Hunter (2006) writes about how a disjuncture exists in the present day between men easily being able to father children in a biological sense, and their struggle to satisfy the social roles of fatherhood. These difficulties are a depiction of the contradictory nature of the formation of men's power post-apartheid (Hunter, 2006). Bryan (2013) speaks about the discomfort that

men may feel in the affectionate functions associated with being nurturing, invested and involved as they are thought to correspond more with feminine perceptions of mothering and contradict influential cultural philosophies where providing is such an important factor to establish gender. They may question whether they are mothering or fathering the child says Bryan (2013).

2.3. The role of the media in constructions of fatherhood

The media has performed a noteworthy function in enforcing images of African men as being infamous for impregnating women and then either denying paternity or being absent fathers, which further emphasises the longstanding radicalized tropes of promiscuous Africans (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams, 1999; Hunter, 2006; Khunuou, 2006; Manyatshe & Nduna, 2014; Ratele, 2012). Chauke and Khunou (2014) believe that fatherhood is seldom depicted in a positive light, for example in newspaper articles of well-known newspapers such as 'The Sowetan', 'City Press', 'Daily Sun' and ' The Pretoria News', there are limited accounts that show the socio-economic challenges in relation to fatherhood, thus failure to provide positives for fathers.Articles in these newspapers that collectively have a readership of over nine million readers, commented on well-known celebrities regarding the topic of fatherlessness with headlines such as 'A nation of deadbeat dads' and ' Super-Sport United Captain a deadbeat dad, court rules' amongst others (Chauke & Khunou, 2014). Fathers have been publically called out and shamed in a manner that may be negatively influential to society about an issue that needs to be more intensely investigated (Chauke & Khunou, 2014)

Clowes (2006) speaks about how the media can be influential in South Africa such as in Drum magazine. Clowes (2006) tells us about how a nurturing father was the portrayed image in the Drum magazine prior to the 1950s, as opposed to contrasting images in other magazines. Dissimilarly to magazines such as the Outspan and Femina which were targeted at white South African audiences, Drum magazine's representation of fatherhood was positioned as crucial to manhood, and privileged men's relationships with their children (Clowes, 2006; Chauke & Khunou, (2014). This was emphasised with photographs of men and their children and advertisements that accentuated father's concerns for their offspring, which fore grounded their roles as father's (Clowes, 2006). Chauke and Khunou (2014), talk about that the media portraying men in certain ways, for example that all fathers are able and willing to be providers, may lead policy makers as well as the media itself to assume that fathers who do not provide for their children are simply refusing to provide. This may be the

dominant portrayal of fathers, regardless of studies in Southern Africa that show that men are not unwilling to maintain their children (Chauke & Khunou, 2014).

Though this may seem insignificant, portrayals in popular media can be influential in setting tones for fatherhood across racial and cultural groups, although perhaps not possible to achieve for all (Chauke & Khunou, 2014). By the 1950's, the portrayals in Drum started to bear resemblance to more that of Outspan and Femina with fathers narrowly portrayed to symbolise the primarily financial obligations of the stereotypical western middle class nuclear family (Clowes, 2006). Again this sets tones for what parenting roles look like, placing emphasis on specific gender roles that may exclude men.

2.4. Cultural and contextual influences on constructions of fatherhood in South Africa

Relevant to the isiZulu culture and similarly for other African cultures, fathering and fatherhood are embroiled in the concept of building a home (Hunter, 2006; Langa, 2010; Ratele, 2012). A successful home in the pre-colonial and early colonial era was regarded as one where a man could father the most children and thus was the most respected household head (Hunter, 2006). In the twentieth century however, the social values around fatherhood remained strong but there were changes such as the gradual replacement of rural agriculture being a man's means of financial lifeblood; the supremacy of Christian representations of smaller nuclear families and the movement of families into urbanization (Hunter 2006; Ratele, 2012). As a result, the implications around fatherhood shifted as migrant labour removed men from their homes and children for lengthy periods of time and men became distant providers (Hunter, 2006; Lesejane, 2006).

During this pre-colonial time, 'ilobolo' was more centralised around child-price rather than the now common sale of a woman (Hunter, 2006). Here fatherhood was interweaved with the social role of 'umnumzana' –head- of the household as the leader and protector of his 'umuzi', with social roles such as supplying 'ilobolo' for his sons and managing his daughter's marriage (Hunter, 2006; Langa 2010). A father was also expected to provide 'inhlawulo' _fine for damages_ if his son impregnated another woman out of wedlock (Hunter, 2006). Fatherhood was fluid where uncles were known as 'ubabaomkhulu'-elder father or 'ubabaomcane'-younger father (Hunter, 2006; Langa 2010).

In the Sepedi culture, there is a saying which goes “ngwana ga se wa shete, ke wa kgoro” (Lesejane, 2006, p. 175) which means a sperm doesn’t beget a child, but also asserts that a child is part of the broader family. Though the extended family was valued in raising a child, fathers still were required to be available to have time with their children in order to implement his moral authority, uphold family customs and principles and show leadership (Langa, 2010; Lesejane, 2006). Being available was a prerequisite for being considered a good role model (Lesejane, 2006). These point to the solid and supportive structures that African cultures provided for men to be able to transition into fatherhood that perhaps are more difficult to achieve today.

Class differences between the man and the woman’s family are significant in ruling out the possibility of a father’s involvement in a child’s upbringing, despite the fact that he may be willing to play the fatherly role (Langa, 2010; Mkhize, 2006). Extended family in African families seem to have the power to make decision when it comes to access to a child. Employment status seems also to play a role in ‘worthiness’ to father. With regards to absent fathers, the child may not take-up the fathers surname or clan name and not perform their father’s important cultural rituals that can have to do with cultural identity, prosperity and peace of mind, which can be another way of rejecting the father by the mother or mother’s family (Nduna, 2014;Smith, Khunou & Nathane-Taulela, 2014).

Nduna (2014) and Mavungu et al. (2013) state that fathers felt that through cultural practices such as taking up your father’s surname places the child in the father’s and forefather’s family and ancestor lineage. Nduna (2014) and Mavungu et al. (2013) express how absent fathers found it to be painful having conceived children that did not use their surnames as a result of their absence and that there was a concern that their children would not know or connect to their roots. Absent fathers believed that a disconnection of a child from their father’s roots was a failure on their part and it brought misfortune to them as fathers as well as to their children, as a result of not being present in the child’s life (Mavungu et al., 2013; Nduna, 2014). Mavungu et al. (2013), make an example of the South African reality television show ‘Khumbul’ekhaya’ which depicts the painful and turbulent consequences of having an absent parent until they are reunited with this parent.

When a man in Mkhize’s (2006) study was asked how he felt as a father in relation to his income status his response was: “If you are not working you are not a genuine father. You are a father because you work. My children do not love me as they used to. I sometimes get

angry with my wife when she asks me whether I am searching for a job. I have lost my status as a man of the house" (Mkhize, 2006, p.185). In times of economic hardship, these constructions may undermine men's abilities to take up father roles. A study showed that employed men were seven times more likely than unemployed men to move from low involvement to high involvement in their children's lives (Gadsden, Wortham & Turner, 2003).

Supportive structures in African culture that were designed to sustain fatherhood such as 'Bogwera'-when boys were prepared for fatherhood through initiation, or 'Kgoro'-when a man inherited a piece of land to cultivate and farm so that he could support his family are no longer strongly practiced, thus making entering fatherhood more difficult for men, especially those from low income status (Lesejane, 2006). Lesejane (2006) also states that the apartheid system and the advances in the liberation for women have challenged the notions around men being the head of the family, as women have begun to gain more economic power.

These previously supportive structures no longer being actively practiced have left young fathers vulnerable (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Bunting, 2005; Devault, Milicent, Quellet, Laurin, Jauron, & Lacharite, 2008; Speake, Cameron, & Gilroy, 1997). Factors such as being young when their first child is born, their employment and income unpredictability, and basic level of education are some of the factors that have contributed to this (Devault et al., 2008). Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein and Felice (2010) found that the majority of teenage and young fathers do not live in the same house with their children, and that they are more often less involved with their children than older fathers, particularly as their children age. Studies suggest that young fathers have a higher chance to have had challenging circumstances in their families of origin, and therefore they have to overcome numerous difficulties, such as identity crisis, intimacy and generativity, simultaneously (Devault et al., 2008; Fursteenberg & Weiss, 2000; Rhoden & Robinson, 1997). This is a crucial time for these young fathers where their child being born puts pressure on them to negotiate all these changes (Devault et al., 2008; Fursteenberg & Weiss, 2000; Rhoden & Robinson, 1997).

Another aspect that has changed or shaped fathering and fatherhood is linked to social dynamics such as the rise of the unemployment rate in the mid-70s to its current 40% nationally (Hunter, 2006). As part of the result, the marital rates have dropped due to the fact that men struggle to pay 'ilobolo' and fulfil the provider role that is expected of them (Hunter, 2006). Hunter (2006) claims that the South African census states that less than 30%

of men in South Africa are in marital relations. According to Mkhize (2006), in the United States poverty has been noted as more prevalent among single-headed African-American households. The statistics appear to be similar in South Africa. In South Africa unemployment and poverty are most prominent in the black population (Mkhize, 2006).What also occurred in the 1970s was the bio-medical interventions of control of African fertility through contraception (Hunter, 2006). With fatherhood being predominantly based on having many children as a part of being considered successful, this challenged and changed the constructions of fatherhood.

According to Hunter (2006), even though children might not represent the monetary value today that they had in the past, men still place high sense of worth on fathering children and on the social responsibilities of fatherhood. The social values that are attributed to fatherhood and achieving as a provider are still highly regarded though much more difficult to achieve (Hunter, 2006).Lesejane (2006) however believes that the esteemed father patriarch is a notion that no longer has significance. Lesejane (2006) states that fathers as once respected men with wisdom, good judgement, care and consideration in African cultures, have become objects of suspicion in the present day. It is quite unlikely that a man without a job will be able to satisfy a provider role and maintain his child and so abandonment has to be analysed in this context (Hunter, 2006).Fatherhood should be understood in context and time, for example, a man can be a good father for the first five years of their child's life and abandon his fatherly responsibilities after (Mkhize, 2006).

What can be gathered is that societal and scientific notions and idealizations of fatherhood may worsen the effects of fatherlessness. Not only that, but these may miss the importance of the father outside of a nuclear family, which could make a father feel blamed for deficits or negative effects on the child. Contextual versus cultural reasons behind fathers being absent may need consideration, rather than a blaming perspective being taken. African constructions of fatherhood versus western perspectives differ. It is also possible that black fathers feel that they play their role and are present in a manner that is not acknowledged by society. There is no single template for fatherhood, this all depends on the time, place and beliefs around masculinity. Socioeconomic status and financial expectations appear to correlate to the achievement of involvement of fathers in their children's lives (Settersten & Cancel-Tirado, 2010).

Definitions around the topic of fatherhood in African cultures are fluid in comparison to western definitions, where it is extended to other male figures such as the grandparent or uncle to assume the father role. This indicates that the construction of fatherhood goes beyond biological definitions. Perhaps men need clearer models instead of what seems to be rather ambiguous roles of fatherhood set by society, especially in a time where cultural and contextual beliefs around the subject seem to be changing.

The idea that all men have the privilege of consistent access or exposure to their children in South Africa is an unrealistic expectation (Clowes, 2006). For black men it seems that being a provider takes precedence over physical presence thus the failure to do this leads to absenteeism (Lesejane, 2006). It needs to be explored what structures have been put in place in order for women to transition into motherhood with more ease than men do, so that perhaps these structures can be put into place for men to facilitate them. Society should perhaps give men room to voice their opinions and feelings around fatherhood and be able to empathise with their suppressed experiences. Fathers who are absent are likely to have their own stresses and threats which prevent them from initiating a relationship with their children. Society and culture may unintentionally have beliefs and expectations that place men in a position to fail at fatherhood. Lastly the power dynamics that are involved when it comes to parenting and who decides when a father gets to claim his right to a child, and gain access may require-evaluation.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research will draw its theoretical framework from the psychosocial tradition, which draws on both social constructionism and psychoanalytic understandings. Psychosocial understandings take into consideration both the social and psychological essentials of human experience (Clarke, 2002; Clarke 2006). This allows research to incorporate external factors such as societal norms and culture, as well as internal aspects such as unconscious motivations of human experience that enhance sociological research analysis as it provides us with deeper insight of human constructions (Clarke, 2002; Clarke 2006). Clarke (2006) argues that there has been a gap that a psychosocial approach can bridge because people are emotional beings that construct themselves in both imagination and affect, that neither sociology nor psychoanalysis can independently explain efficiently. Frosh (2003) states that a psychosocial approach is concerned with the individual's subjectivity emerging from the social sphere, where it looks to evaluate the ideological factors in psychology. Frosh (2003)

makes the example of a human being as a bounded subject of biology and psychology simultaneously, where an individual is not reduced to one or the other. By this Frosh means that the social is not seen as merely no more than the free interactions of individuals or the individual as completely constructed by their social class, gender or race in a manner that the social is "bracketed off" (Frosh, 2003). It is the aim of the psychosocial literature to view the 'individual' and 'society' as a seamless entity that cannot be distinguished, as they are possibly the same thing or intimately connected.

The topic of fatherhood in psychoanalytic literature was founded around patriarchal symbolic representations of the father. However, for many years fathers' parental roles and relationships in experiential terms have been neglected (Freeman, 2008; Ross, 1979). Classical psychoanalytic theory (Freud) describes the father having symbolic presence in his absence with regards to the oedipal complex (Freeman, 2008; Ross, 1979). According to Freud, the father has paternal authority which is validated by his remoteness from and his dissimilarity to the naturalised mother-child relation and directing the child toward culture (Freeman, 2008; Liebman & Abell, 2000). Psychoanalytic theory from Freud, to the work of Klein and Lacan has echoed this concurrent acclaim of paternal power and disregard of the father within the family system (Freeman,2008).Where Lacan distinguished between "the real father" and the "symbolic father", the potency of the father is in his absence may be in material terms (Freeman, 2008).

Opposite to the mother-child attachment relationship, the paternal relationship has been concealed in culture, which places an emphasis on the fact that childcare belongs to women and though fatherhood in psychoanalytic concepts has the stronghold of patriarchal privilege, there is a devaluation of the intricacy of men's parental relationships (Freeman, 2008; Ross, 1979).Generally, the Oedipus complex positions fatherhood at the core of psychoanalytic theory with its early essence to the materialization of individual identity, patriarchal culture and significance of the creation of psychoanalysis (Freeman, 2008; Liebman & Abell, 2000). Only recently, since the mid-70's, the father has been portrayed as "the forgotten" parent in psychoanalytic thought. The idea has emerged that a man's involvement in early childrearing can be positive and the male parent is not without influence. This has been noted as 'the paternal turn' in the literature (Freeman, 2008). Efforts to bring fathers into psychoanalytic thought through experiential corrective approaches to bring into dispute the traditional invisibility of fathers has uncovered the paternal function to be more multidimensional and

actively engaged than the traditional psychoanalytic view of a limited authoritarian figure (Freeman, 2008). These approaches have concerned themselves with the certainty of men's various experiences as fathers and representations of 'the good-enough' father have emerged alongside the problems associated with paternal absence (Freeman, 2008). Liebman and Abell (2000), state that areas that were regarded influential within the subject of the mother, are also being thought of as being paternal. This moves psychoanalytic thinking from a position where the father's role was solely that of the loathed and feared forbidder of the child's incestuous wishes and him primarily being responsible for the progression and resolution of the oedipal complex (Liebman & Abell, 2000).

Mahler, though having focused on exploring the maternal role, reached the acknowledgement of the father as important and as performing a secondary role in child development by entering the infant's unconscious from the outside, assuming an ambivalent and reassuring stance during the separation individuation period (Liebman & Abell, 2000). According to Mahler, the father would then present the child with a substitute to re-engulfment and regressive symbiosis with the mother (Liebman & Abell, 2000). This was reiterated by Ablein in 1975 suggesting that the father was the first representative of the non-mother world who aims to point the child to the broader world of people and objects outside of the mother (Liebman & Abell, 2000). In addition to this Ablein suggested strongly that the father influenced the formation of the child's core gender identity as well as the modulation of aggressive impulses in the child (Liebman & Abell, 2000).

This notion of the father as the 'first stranger' is now challenged in psychoanalytic thought as there is growing acceptance that men can and should be involved as child caretakers and interest in the early dyadic infant-father relationship (Liebman & Abell, 2000).Now contemporary works of Spieler and Kohut have described the father not as the first stranger but rather that the child develops psychological representations of both parents concurrently, and that the father plays a significant role in the creation of mirroring and idealizing self-objects in their children (Liebman & Abell, 2000)

Trowell and Etchegoyen, (2002)speak about fatherhood as more than a biological change that occurs, stating that it encompasses psychological and emotional changes where the child's well-being takes priority over one's own. For this to occur, a man needs to have had satisfactory childhood experiences, internalized 'good-enough' emotional, psychological,

physical and social carers, and a good sense of identity (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002).Trowell and Etchegoyen (2002) describe fatherhood as a process where a man goes through unconscious fantasies of simultaneously wanting the baby and feeling threatened by it. Intrapsychically his masculinity is affirmed and he has identification reactions to his own father, however, he also experiences unconscious feelings of loss of freedom and envy for the mother and feeling displaced (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002). The need to work through oedipal conflicts and to let go of his relationship with his mother and be the third person that's 'left out' are all deemed a part of the process of transitioning into fatherhood (Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002).

There has been recent curiosity in exploring lived and subjective experiences of masculinity from the psychodynamic perspective (Langa, 2015). Psychodynamic theory has been considered by Frosh to be useful for analyzing and identifying contradictory desire, conflicts and emotional comprises involved in negotiating hegemonic and subordinate forms of masculinity (Langa, 2015). Cartwright and Kvale have also demonstrated that qualitative psychodynamic perspectives can be useful methodologically as these can uncover the subject's social, psychological, and influenced behaviour from external and internal psychical processes (Langa, 2015). Frosh has also encouraged the use of psychodynamic theory in research involving gender studies as it opens up room for exploring what it means to be a gendered male subject, as being positioned as either masculine or feminine is a distinctive characteristic of psychodynamic theory (Langa, 2015).

This makes this approach relevant for this specific study as the constructions of fatherhood have subliminal links to masculinity and gender. The focus on intrapsychic experience mean that this approach can be tailored for the topic of fatherhood as the aim is to address the lived aspects of these men subjectively.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research questions

- What are the constructions of fatherhood and absent fatherhood amongst absent Black African fathers in South Africa?
- How do these constructions of fatherhood influence men being absent fathers?

- How do absent fathers understand and feel about not playing an active role in raising their children?

4.2. Research approach

The approach that was used was a qualitative psychosocial approach which drew on both social constructionism and psychoanalytic understandings (Frosh, 2003; Saville Young, 2009). This allowed the research to incorporate both the social and psychological essentials of human experience (Clarke, 2002; Clarke 2006). This approach intended to assist in trying to resolve the struggle between the individual to being seen as either solely "personal" or solely comprised by their social class, race, gender, etcetera and in terms of relations between individuals (Frosh, 2003). This approach suited the study's aims to explore absent fatherhood as a construct determined by both participants' personal and social experiences of fatherhood. It is rare in psychological literature to observe the individual and society as a seamless entity as they are often traditionally differentiated, and it was the purpose of this psychosocial approach to consider them as closely connected (Frosh, 2003; Saville Young, 2009).

Semi structured interviews were used to collect data. The data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) interpretive thematic analysis within a psychosocial framework. Frosh (2003) states that a psychosocial approach is concerned with the individual's subjectivity emerging from the social sphere, where it looks to evaluate the ideological factors in psychology. Psychoanalysis is appealing to psychosocial research as it has rich descriptions for inter-subjective processes for example projection and identification that depict how social interactions can correlate at both the individual and social levels (Saville Young, 2009). In this way, absent fathers' psychologies and their broader cultural and historical factors were encompassed in the data collection and analysis. The process was socially aware and individual-sensitive, as this approach is part of the post-culturalist sphere that has its basis for knowledge in social theory, philosophy, linguistics, cultural studies, critical theory, psychoanalysis and discourse studies (Frosh, 2003).This research looked at affective components of absent fathers' social relations and explored aspects of their social worlds that are influenced by feelings and emotive dynamics that are not always conscious (Clarke, 2006). The focus was on their psychological relatedness in relation to themselves as fathers and others (Clarke, 2006), such as their children, the mothers of their children, and their own families of origin. This concerned rational conscious perceptions and ideas, as well as unconscious perceptions, desires and wishes, in an intricate interrelationship parallel to one another (social factors influence the psychological and vice-versa) (Clarke, 2006).

4.3. Credibility and Trustworthiness

The problem of credibility in qualitative research can be dealt with by ensuring that appropriate operational measures in the terms of the tools, processes and data analysis are used, in order to answer the research questions at hand (Leung, 2015; Shenton, 2004). The reliability, or credibility, (as referred to in qualitative studies), of this study was ensured through the researcher using her supervisor as an additional mind to review the themes and judge whether they represent the narratives presented (Elliot, Fischer &Rennie, 1999; Flick, 1998). Comparison of the data to itself as well as existing data from other similar sources can also assist in insuring the credibility of the research (Leung, 2015; Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) explains the issue of credibility by stating that the researcher needs to demonstrate a 'true' picture of the phenomenon under question. Other authors refer to this process of discovering 'truth' (quantitative studies) in qualitative studies as establishing the 'trustworthiness' (Mishler, 2000) of the findings and ensuring that they are 'defensible' (Johnson, 1997).

While this was the aim of this study, it needs to be acknowledged that, due to fears of judgment, the participants may have limited what they said during the interviews and this may have limited the authenticity of the responses received by the researcher. Also, as a result of not having interviewed the partners of the father's in question, the information received was taken in good faith. This means that the researcher did not have an alternative way to verify the results for accuracy and thus the narratives told are one-sided. Shenton (2004) advises to offer options to participants, such as being able to refuse to participate or discontinue with the study, in order to counter the above occurring. These options were offered to the participants in this study. It also needs to be acknowledged that due to the fact that fatherhood is a fairly new research focus, there was a difficulty in sourcing a lot of literature on the topic particularly South African literature, thus it was more of a challenge to expand on ideas as well as substantiate some results as they were new. The study relied on few resources and many were international sources. Given this, the research underwent peer scrutiny by academics who have previously researched the topic and feedback was offered to the researcher in order to challenge the assumptions made and validate the research (Shenton, 2004).

4.4. Participants

The sampling method used was purposive snowball sampling. Due to the fact that this was a difficult sample to reach, purposive snowball sampling seemed to be the most suitable method, as this involved identifying a sample with specific traits that met the requirements of the research (Boyatzi, 1998; Selganik & Heckathorn, 2004).The researcher, sourced participants in Johannesburg through a process of posting posters around the University of the Witwatersrand campus, placing an invitation to participate in the research on social media (Facebook) and through word of mouth through friends and colleagues.

Finding participants that met the criteria who were willing to speak about their experiences proved to be exceptionally challenging and the criteria were broadened halfway through the data collection process in order to widen the pool of prospective participants. Initially the researcher had planned to source participants that had not had any contact with at least one or all of their children shortly after their children's birth (0-12 months), i.e. no contact after 12 months after birth. However, with the difficulty encountered finding this sample, the researcher extended the period of initial contact to 24 months with no contact thereafter. The children at the time of the interview were initially required to be at least five years old, in order for the father to have had sufficient time to integrate and grapple with the idea of being an absent father. However, this criterion was also broadened and the eventual sample consisted of fathers whose children were below the initial intended age and ranged between 3 and 8 years old. This meant that the researcher had to take into account that not all fathers may have had enough time to grapple with the idea of being absent fathers.

The participants for this study eventually consisted of five Black South African males between the ages of 25-50, who had been absent fathers for at least a year or more. Socioeconomic status was not regarded as an exclusion criterion as the researcher wanted to generate a variety of possible responses about fatherhood that were not necessarily influenced by class.

4.5. Data collection

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed once by the researcher and each interview lasted approximately 60minutes. The interviews took place at each participant's work place. An interview schedule (Appendix 5), comprised of a set of basic questions was used to guide the interview, as well as on the spot prompt questions. A device was used to audio record the interview, with the participant's permission. Participants' were asked to reflect on their ideas about fatherhood in general, their own

experiences with regards to being fathers who are not present in their children's lives, and on their own experiences of being fathered.

The researcher used a free association narrative interview method, where the participants were asked open-ended questions that attempted to draw out stories. These were understood to contain latent meanings through inconsistencies, avoidances, and omissions or absences that in and of themselves can be interpreted (Saville Young,2009). The researcher avoided asking "why" questions as this may have unconsciously motivated the participant to be anxious or defended against expressing their true feelings and resort to intellectualised responses (Saville Young, 2009). This technique also involved using the participants' phrasing and ordering of responses in order to respect and retain the participants own meaning of experience (Saville Young, 2009). The researcher kept the audio-recordings and transcripts in a password protected file. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts and pseudonyms have been used in the reporting of the findings. No identifying details were included in this report.

4.6. Data Analysis

The data analysis method that was used broadly followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) interpretive thematic content analysis, but attention was also paid to language use and participants' positioning of themselves in relation to their narratives, informed by a psychosocial approach. There were six steps involved in analyzing the data. In the first step, the researcher transcribed and familiarized herself with the data. It was re-read multiple times and initial ideas were noted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second step was to generate initial codes in a systemic fashion across the transcriptions and the data was collated to each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was different to final themes as the initial codes were much more specific.

The analysis of the identified themes that emerged from the transcribed narratives were then compared and grouped into broader recurring themes, as well as any infrequent themes between the participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then gathered all the data relevant to potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).Themes related to constructions of fatherhood, absent fatherhood and any internal and external factors that appeared to influence the men's constructions of absentee fatherhood were then reported upon. This stage of the analysis used social constructionist and psychoanalytic lenses to inform decisions

around themes. The researcher focused on both intrapsychic and social factors influencing constructions of absentee fatherhood when interpreting and transcribing the interviewees' responses. For instance, the researcher paid attention to themes relating to broader social discourses as well as more personally-determined understandings of fatherhood. The researcher also attempted to uncover the underlying meanings of these themes for the participants.

The fourth step that was taken was to review the themes and to check if the themes worked in relation to the coded extracts in level one and the entire data set, and a thematic map was generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Aspects of Clarke's (2006) biographical interpretive method of analysis were also used. This involved the identification of possible unconscious meanings in the participants' stories and the use of the researcher counter-transference during the interviews. This helped the researcher to think about why the participants' may have chosen to tell the stories they told in the ways they did and what they may have been trying to communicate to the researcher (Clarke, 2006). Analysis also involved examining the respondent's way of ordering and phrasing statements while they told their stories in order to gain a better understanding of the unconscious motivations, life history and conflicts behind their social identity formation (Clarke, 2006).

The fifth step that was taken was the definition and naming of the themes that were generated. The analysis took particular psychosocial principles into consideration. It was concerned with the participants as social entities and considered materialization of subjectivity within the social domain (Frosh, 2003). This method of analysis offered an accessible and flexible approach to analyzing the narrative which was appropriate for the study, as it was anticipated that due to the topic possibly generating diverse responses and the fact that it is an area that is not extensively researched, the material may require flexibility in its management (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The sixth and final step was writing the report that used the analysis to answer the research questions and situate the findings in relation to the literature. Methodologically and theoretically, traditionally marginalized theory such as psychoanalysis, with an interest in interdisciplinary approaches to psychology, and interest in personal and social change including psychotherapy were explored (Frosh, 2003). Furthermore, the meaning of the participants' experiences were interpreted through what they said about their subjective

realities as opposed to how these accounts are representative of "truth" (Saville Young, 2009).

4.7. Reflexivity

Reflexivity throughout the research process was emphasised. A substantial amount of self-awareness was required of the researcher in relation to the topic as psychosocial research views reflexivity as essential as the researcher is viewed as being part of the process (Campbell, 2002; Padgett, 2004). Bias was thus inevitable from me and the topic being a sensitive one, I was conscious of the societal judgement and stigma surrounding absentee fatherhood. I held this in mind and made every effort to be respectful the men's experiences, viewpoints and opinions (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). I made an effort to allay any fears around possible judgement in the participants.

I began every interview by stating my awareness of their possible concerns and discomfort around discussing such personal and sensitive material. I reassured the participants that my only aim was to hear their side of their story in order to better understand absent fatherhood and not to judge it. I was aware that my identity as a young Black female may be difficult for the fathers, and I kept this in mind and was sensitive to it. I was aware that by virtue of being a female, men may have struggled with viewing me as just a researcher and my gender could have made them uncomfortable, as some of the questions required them to be honest about their ex-partners. This would mean that they could possibly limit their responses or be disingenuous in fear of offending me. My age possibly meant that some of the interviewees could have possibly identified me with their children, or viewed me through a cultural lens where they would be viewed as my elder. This may have contributed to some struggle being "questioned" by someone my age. I was constantly aware of my gender, race and class as a possible positive or negative influencing factor for participants and in meaning making (Saville Young, 2011). I was aware of possibly projecting my personal responses into the participants due to my identification with them at points during the interviews (Boyatzis, 1998).

Some participants became emotional when talking to me. Many of the participants became emotional when speaking about the ways in which they wished to have a different relationship with their children and how they felt about being absent fathers. At these times, I paused the interview to allow that participant some time to compose himself and if appropriate to reflect on the participant's feelings. At these times, I also tried to be aware of

my own feelings in response to the participants' pain. Specifically in psychosocial research, the researcher's feelings and actions also needed to be analyzed for their unconscious content so that any phantasies, introjections or projections that emerged were noted along with their possible impact on the research (Saville Young, 2009).

Given my own history, which included an absent father, I noted that I found it difficult not to become emotional when listening to some of the participants' narratives, and at times, experienced difficulty remaining neutral in my stance. My feelings differed from question to question as I felt sorry for the participants when they expressed their deep longing to be with their children and their preoccupation and concern of their children's well-being. This made me wonder and fantasize about whether this was my father's experience which made me become more empathetic not only to my personal situation but with the men I was talking to as well. At times I felt irritated and upset as I felt that the men did not try hard enough to be in their children's lives and rather made what felt like excuses for their absence which again made me fantasize about my own father's efforts regarding our situation.

I was constantly aware of the possible vicarious trauma that both myself and my participants might experience and I noted emotions such as irritation, agitation, and disagreeableness in both the participants and myself, which may have indicated some over-identification that may have occurred (Nduna et al., 2015b). When this occurred, I immediately debriefed with my supervisor and took note of what was happening. These dynamics were considered useful information and were taken into account during the following interviews and analysis of the data.

4.8. Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained before the research took place. Consent to participate in the research as well as for the audio recording of the interviews was obtained before the interviews were conducted. Anonymity in reporting of the results and confidentiality was guaranteed by the researcher through the use of pseudonyms and through the removal of any identifying personal information from the transcripts. This research was likely to bring up difficult feelings and the researcher made every effort to exercise sensitivity and take this into consideration during the course of conducting the research (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). It was likely that the men may have feared being judged for their decisions not to be involved fathers and the researcher took care to ensure that the participants felt respected. Nduna et al.

(2015a) emphasize the importance of the ethical process with regards to father absence in order to ensure the physical and emotional safety of the researcher and participants. For example Nduna et al. (2015a) discuss the potential of some interview responses being unlawful though essential to the study. This could be with regards to disclosing their deliberate avoidance of paying child support or disclosing incriminating reasons for their separation from their partner such as domestic violence. In these instances, the researcher undertook to maintain confidentiality, give that no-one was at any direct risk.

The researcher was also aware that the participants may view their participation in the study as a means to receiving therapeutic benefit such as intervention to change their situation or personal circumstances, which may leave the participants feeling regretful of participating in the study and sharing their sensitive experiences with no solutions offered (Nduna et al., 2015a). It was made clear to participants before the interviews that the researcher would be engaging with participants in her capacity a researcher and that she could provide referrals for counselling if required. Another ethical consideration was that even though the participants had consented to interviews, extremely emotional feelings were likely to come up that could cause distress to participants. Although certain participants appeared to experience the interview as more distressing than the others, all of the participants were given the details for the Emthonjeni Community Psychology Clinic (free service) (011) 717 4513. When participants became distressed, further consent to continue with the interview was gained regardless of the fact that initial consent was given and that counselling would be offered after the interview (Nduna et al., 2015a).

5. RESULTS

In the following section the results of the analysis are presented. The main themes that were found are presented under three main headings: constructions of fatherhood; constructions of absent fatherhood; and the historical and contextual influences on fatherhood. These themes and their relevant sub-themes have been presented below. Pseudonyms and direct quotations by the participants have been used to ensure the integrity of the data is protected. These results explore how these five Black South African fathers construct both fatherhood and absent fatherhood and the contextual factors that are understood to influence these constructions. These results further attempt to answer how the fathers in question use these particular constructions in positioning themselves as absent fathers as well as how this has influenced how they feel about being absent fathers.

5.1. Constructions of fatherhood

Despite being absent fathers, the men interviewed all had ideas about fatherhood and what it entailed. The sub-themes below describe how participants constructed fatherhood from their personal experiences as well as how these constructions were influenced by figures in their lives. This included a father as a provider, symbol of strength and source of wisdom and guidance; maternal influences on constructions of fatherhood; the connection of fatherhood to culture and tradition; Fatherhood as a natural role and the power in the behind fatherhood role.

5.1.1. Father as provider, symbol of strength and source of wisdom and guidance

Participants regarded fatherhood as a role with the function of satisfying a child's every need and working hard by any means necessary to fulfil their children's needs. They viewed fathers as providers, a symbol of strength and as passing down wisdom and guidance about life. A father was regarded as someone who is responsible. Sipho highlighted the care-taking role of a father in his description: "Well to me a father is someone who takes care, like when you joining fatherhood it means now have a family, hopefully a wife, and kids and you father them you know. So basically taking care of them and being a part of their lives. Ja that's what I think fatherhood is" (Sipho). Jabu also constructed fathers as care-takers, but emphasized the responsibility of this role with regards to providing guidance to their children, so that their children might not replicate their mistakes:

> Uh, what I can say is that a father is somebody who might be looking after her or his kids. Providing everything that the kids need…It's a responsible somebody…To give guidance to the kids of what you have experienced in life. The wrong-doings. The wrongs that you did in the past, and the ones that is facing the upcoming future. To guide the kids so they cannot fall in the trap that we fell into…we need to let them know that me as your father, I went a bad path, please just avoid this, do this. Don't have two relationships at the same time. Have only one. Be reliable. Do be honest to your partner because nowadays we've got lot of things that are happening. Diseases. Lots of things (Jabu).

Jabu's comment seemed overwhelmed by a sense of regret for mistakes he felt he had made as a partner. However, despite these mistakes as a partner, he felt that he could still play a role as a father and use his regrets to guide his children not to make the same mistakes. The notion of fathers as role-models who need to behave in particular ways was also mentioned by Themba:

> To respect the people. You'll never be a father mara [but] you don't respect…Like old people. The children. First thing, you must respect the child. That is a supposed to be a father. If you are gonna beat the child, the child will never call you a father. Who's gonna call you a father if you're gonna beat a some people outside or a child inside your house (Themba).

Tshepo also constructed the role of father as someone who shows their children how to manage life:

> A father ne, that's being there for your children. From the word go. Taking care of them or satisfying them in every way even though sometimes it's impossible. But you have to work hard to give them what they want or need…showing them how to be strong in life, about how to prosper most of the time when I look at myself it's very difficult (Tshepo).

Tshepo's comment suggested that a father is present and responsive to his children's needs but that the role of a father is 'very difficult' and sometimes even 'impossible'. His later comment: "Eish, well every man would, can die for their kids I mean, it's hard work I mean waking up early in the morning knowing that they have to go to school, wear everything, you know it's not a play thing" (Tshepo), also constructed the father role as a huge responsibility ('not a play thing') and that the role can mean being willing to 'die for their kids', suggesting that his construction of an 'ideal father' might be one that is hard to attain or live up to. Thato's construction of a father also contained the notion of responsibility, but like Tshepo, he seemed to position the role as one for which 'you need to be man enough':

> A father, I can say a father is a head of the house. A responsible person if you make a damage. I can say a father, he's many things in one., but it differ to take a responsibility… you need to be man enough and use your capacity in each and everything that you are doing. And be responsible for each and everything, what you

> are doing and you have to be safe every time…How do you handle life and then you have to categorize things of life: today now I'm a father. Now I'm responsible of one, two three (Thato).

Responsibility was constructed by all the participants as core to the role of father. However, this responsibility was seen to be extremely difficult, even 'terrible' at times:

> It's hard to be a father, because you have more challenges than when you don't have a child. Mara [but] if you are a father, you have more challenges. There was there we buying some kimbies [nappies]. Hao he called you, we buy the kimbies [nappies] with the first, ne with… with the 15 he say the kimbies [nappies]are finished and give me R300. Where are you gonna get R300? You are supposed to buy food here. You must go to mashonisa [money lender]. Go and do maybe a loan, you must pay. Then you see you end up you don't have money to buy you a t-shirt or maybe shoes. Ja that is why it's terrible (Themba).

Themba's description of what it means to be a father was one that evoked a picture of fatherhood as a desperate state of trying to provide without the means to do so. He added that this pressure on fathers to provide is exacerbated by the judgments of others, who will not consider someone a father if he cannot provide for his children:

> You must, if you are the father you must know when you go home what you must supposed to bring on the table. That you see you are the father, not that you must go and drink and tell people I'm a father. Of who? The people are gonna ask you are the father? What is your son's name or your daughter's name? You said you are the father you, mara [but] you didn't bring the food, you bring the clothes for your children (Themba).

These constructions of fatherhood begin to reveal a role that is perhaps ambivalently held in the minds of these men. While it is seen as an idealized state of care-taking that carries wisdom, it is also portrayed as one of 'terrible' responsibility that can leave a father feeling inadequate if unable to provide. There were also ideas within the narratives that fathers can choose not to take on this responsibility and that the role of father can be taken up with one family but not another. Sipho felt that men have the option to father as many children as they

pleased with different partners, if the situation in which they found themselves hindered taking on a father role in one family:

> Others do try and eventually give up, find another wife, find other kids you know…and other kids what do they do? They say hao this father neglected us and look the father wanted to connect with the kids and gave up because it was really he felt…argh, you know what, this woman is just something else. And the woman thinks she's the only one. For us guys I can just go have multiple relationships as I said. I could have multiple families you know, so that you tend to find that, as now I find a new wife, new kids (Sipho).

5.1.2. Maternal influences on constructions of fatherhood

These men's constructions of fatherhood appeared to have been strongly influenced by the females in their lives, mainly their mothers, grandmothers and partners. They felt that it was within these relationships that they learned to be fathers. Male figures often weren't available, thus through this absence they have constructed fatherhood. The absence of their own fathers also appeared to have resulted in more identification with the maternal sides of their families.

Jabu stated that it was through his romantic partners, as well as his maternal family's provision for him of a stable home, that he learned about fatherhood. He regarded his paternal family as having failed in this regard, as he seemed to believe that a father is responsible for providing this: "I've got them [ideas about fatherhood] from my previous marriage and the relationships…Okay my uncle, my grandfather and my grandmother, eh, grew me up very well. Then we even end up building our own home in the maternal side. Mmm, unlike my fathers' side where we supposed to be" (Jabu).

Tshepo learned from his mother that parenting takes strength and hard work and that one should not 'chase after people' as it is a care-givers choice to be part of their children's lives. This has now been repeated in his handling of having contact with his child as he has internalized this way of thinking: "My mom… Well it wasn't simple for her… my mom was brave enough to take care of us… She tried her best to make us look better… my mom taught me that believe in yourself and don't stress yourself about other people. If he doesn't want to be part of you leave him. Let it be" (Tshepo).

Themba regarded his grandmother's upbringing and guidance as very important in how he lives his life. He reported following her instructions and believing and respecting all he is taught. He seemed to insinuate having lost respect for his paternal figures: "Oh me you see I grow up without no father. Ja so at home my grandmother told me, lecture me what you must do. Me too I don't know what I must do first. I was going to my grandmother, what I'm gonna do now? She said 'hai just do this one two three, gonna grow up, just don't jump, first nje you must do your things, after you do some things ge…That one I respect most (Themba).

Through the men having been brought up by their maternal families as well as experiencing how their partners take on the primary care-giver roles, it seems that they may believe that maternal families are safer and more reliable when it comes to care-giving, as they seem to have more faith in them.

5.1.3. Fatherhood connection to culture and tradition

Fatherhood seemed to be inseparable from culture and tradition, interlinking with and influencing one another. This was particularly apparent around traditional rituals, where Jabu's experience was that a father would inevitably be needed to be part of their child's life, as African practice requires the performance of rituals that involve a father. This appeared to encourage contact between the mother's family and the father: "No I didn't have it at all. The time when she was bringing her was when the kid was bothering them with these ancestral things" (Jabu).

Thato echoed Jabu's sentiments regarding African rituals binding fathers' participation in their children's lives. He felt that there was pride in not only being a black father but a black father who is in touch with and knowledgeable about African culture and traditions. He strongly believed that a father should follow their culture and stick to it when it comes to raising children as opposed to embracing other customs:

> You know to be a black father in South Africa, me I'm very proud. I'm very proud to be a black father. 'Cause I know many things you see. Traditional, are the things whereby I know. And I know to say, to be a black father… You see and what I love most of the time to be a Black father, I don't like adoptions. I love my way. I love my

way. To adopt something and say I'm being there, I'm leaving my stuff because now I've adopt that thing, no (Thato).

5.1.4. Fatherhood as 'natural'

These men viewed fatherhood as a positive experience in which the child is a biological extension of oneself: "A father is a word that if you decide you, if you sleep with a woman, you end the woman is pregnant. It's there the father come. You are the father" (Themba). They felt that a father completes a family and that he is a necessary component to a family. Sipho regarded fatherhood as natural as well as a role that can create a family. Fatherhood was seen as continuous and as a way for your genes to live on:

> I think it's a great thing to be part of a family and you get to, to, to, to create sporns where your, your genes can be transferred to your future generations. So fatherhood is a great thing. I mean it means you will live your generations after you will be living forever if you do participate in fatherhood and have a family…It's just a natural instinct. No I think it's something that is natural. Natural selection (Sipho).

Tshepo stated that a father is in equal standing as a mother in terms of care-giving and what he can offer his child:

> I mean, loving your daughter, I mean if you love your son or loving your children. I mean every child needs a parents love. Not only the mother but both parents. It's not always about one giving more love than the other. It has to be I don't know maybe be the same. Ja. Same love. Where a kid wouldn't say it's easy to talk to mommy but when I go to dad its' like eish I can't and Ja (Tshepo).

Thato's experience taught him that biological lineage is what creates a real family. He believed that one can be accommodated in a non-biological family, but that love has limits where there is no biological connection:

> One day that father where I grow up, he take me, sit down, and tell me you know what, I won't treat you as my child exactly, but what I did provide, I was making to say that you have to grow up and see life and see things. But now I see you are strong enough. You see, I won't leave you in my house, cause if I can die, my kids they will

> kick you out. 'Cause now they accept you 'cause I'm still living, but immediately their mother dies or me I'm dying they will kick you out. So it will be a problem at the end of the day for you (Thato).

Themba agreed that fatherhood is reliant on biology: A father is a word that if you decide you, if you sleep with a woman, you end the woman is pregnant. It's there the father come. You are the father" (Themba).

As in Thato's comment above, the issue of stepfathers was one that evoked mixed feelings. Jabu and Themba felt that they did not agree with children having step parents as a replacement for their biological fathers, however, they still gave up their children when their relationships with their children's mothers ended out of respect. Jabu did not feel that he could have contact with his child while she was living under the care of another man, as the new partner by African custom is regarded as his child's new father. Due to his belief in and respect for culture he felt that when a relationship ends with a woman, a biological father should be willing to let his child be raised by the mother's new partner:

> You find the lady is staying with another man. So it would be disrespectful to go and see your kid in somebody's house. Because as an African we believe in, when you're marrying somebody with two or three kids those are your kids. You don't even want to see the father. The biological father. Coming to your house and seeing his biological kid. Mmm, we see it as disrespectful. So it's becoming a very difficult issue to us (Jabu).

Themba however felt that when a romantic relationship ends, the biological father should still remain in their child's life. He felt that the best interest of a child is to have their biological father in their life. However, he accepted that society approves of step parents and that this may be his and his child's reality:

> He said the mother don't come back here. The father they must ask the mothers, okay I'll never come back to you, I'll come back to the son or the child only. It's that thing they're supposed to understand but the children they need their father. It's not right to raise with another father mara [but] now people they said its ok (Themba).

5.1.5. Power behind fatherhood

Half of the participants also reflected on the power that fathers hold. Their narratives reflected the idea that fathers seemed to have the option to do as they pleased, as they hold the key to authority and decision making. Even though his father was largely absent in his life, Jabu's experience of a father was that ultimately he holds the power to decide on the most important things such as access to the rest of the family:

> I experienced big problems when I was still young. Even we were seven in the family. My younger brother passed on in 2005. So my father by then eh denied us the access to bury him… my father came with two policemen that gave us a court order that we must not come to the funeral. Even today I don't know where my father, my younger brother or my sibling laid to rest (Jabu).

Like Jabu, Thato's notion of power in relation to fatherhood was that it is a role that carries a sense of superiority that cannot be challenged. A father is someone that should be obeyed and holds the authority to a child's wants and needs. Despite his father being an alcoholic, his father's word appeared to be law in the home:

> Ja so in most of the time I had to sit down and look at him when he's drunk and he will talk the way he is, and say the way he can handle the world. And no one can say something, you see. Which means each and everyone before he's going to do something, he's supposed to go past him and say Oh Lord, can I do this?…exactly, you see. Cause everyone he wanted to say he must get a permission from him before you're going to do something. Without his permission that person won't do nothing (Thato).

These experiences of fathers as holding a great deal of power to provide or with-hold or to condone or forbid, may have influenced the ways in which these fathers understand and feel about fatherhood.

5.2. Constructions of absent fatherhood

For many of these men, their constructions of absent fatherhood were based on their experiences with the paternity of their own fathers being questioned. Their experiences of

being absent fathers themselves also informed their ideas in this regard, and in some cases, the questioning of paternity was inter-generationally repeated:

> He just told me that 'hey bra, it's impossible you're not my child'. That's what he said. I'm not his kid, I'm not his blood, to just forget about that… And I think again the problem could've have been because I was angry I even said this child is not mine… she reminded me immediately after giving birth that you said that this is not your child (Tshepo).

For Thato there seemed to be a confusion regarding his father's paternity, where he received unresolved conflicting messages, which he reported had emotionally affected him, as it was stated to him so frequently. He believed that at the end of the day the woman will know the truth and the man will have to deal with a level of uncertainty:

> Eish, my relationship with my father, it was bad. I won't say it was nice cause my father you know he was like that kind of person when he's drunk, he can love you as much as he can, but in that particular hours, maybe he will give you only two hours happy, and then after those two hours, he will swear at you, he will tell you that 'you're not my child, you are someone's child, ja I'm feeding you for nothing. Your father I don't know where he is'. You see all those kind of stuff. So it was a daily bread you see. This thing it stays on my head you see. My mind is always, my father used to tell me this, it was daily bread. So now I grow up with that thing you see. So I tell myself to say eish, actually I don't know, he's my real father, or he's not my father I don't know. But when I'm asking my mother she'll tell me 'it's your father'. So I realised one thing to say that my mom is the one who knows the truth. So when she says he's your father, I can't deny it. You see I can't deny it, I have to agree with her. So ok no this is my father, it's the way he is, you see. Cause after all she's the one who did sleep with him. So she's the one who knows the truth...yes! I was questioning it, I was questioning it cause I didn't… I even jumped to my uncles and asked, actually this person, who is he? (Thato).

For these fathers paternity is questionable and something that accompanies fatherhood, which may have contributed to their doubts about the paternity of their children. Overall, however, the participants constructed absent fatherhood as emotional and physical absence from a

child. Some were aware of long lasting effects absenteeism, having had their own experiences of the absence and loss of their fathers. Sipho also emphasized the absence experienced by the father, without the child in his life:"uh well basically it's a, it's a kid growing up without the father that's absent. You know not present. The father's life. I mean the kids life…I mean absence everywhere…you not supporting the kids emotions, you not" (Sipho). Jabu felt that not seeing a child daily even though you may see them now and again makes you absent as you do not play a role in raising them meaning you have little or no influence in their lives: "Absent father it's like when you cannot see your kids on a daily basis. Maybe seeing sometimes after a month or two, but not staying together every day where you can bring the kid up. Just a distant relationship" (Jabu).

Like Sipho, Thato regarded an absent father as someone who is not present in all aspects of being there for a child. He further emphasized financial absence and the idea that absent fathers demonstrate an ability to suppress any thoughts of his child, not holding them in mind or feeling any desire to be present in his child's life:

> Absent father means a person who's not there for the child…in many ways. Me honestly, I'm not there for my child. I'm not there for my child…in everything. I don't even put in a cent. I don't even think about my child. I don't even do nothing. You know even if I've got money, I don't even put a cent. I won't even think to buy airtime and phone my kid (Thato).

What was clear for Thato was that he suppressed any possibility of being a present father as he found the idea of partial presence as a father too emotionally burdensome to bear. He felt that having been part of conceiving something precious and not being able to fully invest and see the outcome was not worthwhile and pointless for him:

> No, it's just because it make my heart sore you know. It like you've got a flower somewhere, they've got a pipe from that side, you have to always pour water, but you don't know that flower it grows or it dies, you see. It's like that to me. So if I'm going to put something every month for something I don't even see, it's very useless on my side. You know it's very useless on my side (Thato).

Themba echoed the opinions of all the fathers but expressed an awareness of the remaining painful effects of having had an absent father which he does not want his child to experience: "Like a father that one it don't come to see his child. He don't do something the child he wants to do…It's not right. It's not right because when the child is grow up, the child is gonna be maybe disturbed. Where's my father? Like me. Me, I'm disturbed" (Themba).

5.2.1. Powerlessness due to financial and cultural expectations

The participants expressed the notion that fatherhood feels like a constant financial battle where they have been handed a raw deal. Many alluded to them becoming absent fathers as a result of this. Many also expressed that culturally-informed ideas around fathers as financial providers contributed to this pressure. Jabu felt that fathers are absent because of financial issues. He did not feel that black fathers have enough money to provide for their children and that if they earned more this could be a possibility. Jabu felt that this was out of these fathers control for many reasons:

> South African men we don't have enough money to look after the needs of our kids. Mmm, then it affects them because whatever she wants, by then sometimes you don't afford to buy it…that's the problem to be a Black African man. Others when can afford, we are working different eh, eh jobs and different institutions. Mmmm. Some of them are not paying well. So but then at the end of the day you cannot blame the employer because everything has got its standard. You can't pay over mmm you cannot pay above inflation rate. Everyone pays according to his budget and the inflation rate. And then the qualifications (Jabu).

Like Jabu, Thato also felt that fathers are absent due to their income, however he did not consider this to be the only factor holding them back from being involved in their children's lives:"It's just because it differ 'cause some fathers, they are not earning the very same wages you know…besides money its they're irresponsible" (Thato).

Participants expressed dissatisfaction around cultural practices such as damages and lobola. They felt that these practices are expensive and 'unnatural'. They reported having to go through extremes to do 'the right thing' culturally, but feeling that their sacrifices were not enough. Themba felt that he had to go to the extreme of getting a bank loan in order to gain access to his child. He reported that even though he made this difficult effort, it was not

regarded as enough and his efforts and financial situation were not taken into consideration by the maternal family:

> I go to Capitec because they say I'm supposed to pay the damage. Capitec I borrow the R4000. Just a half. They said to me when my grandmother can go. They tell my grandmother we need the R8000, not a 4000. I said my grandmother, take this 4000 and we come back and we pay another R4000. They said we don't need your money. Take your money and go (Themba).

Some saw the practices of lobola and damages as 'trading for love' which stands in the way of a future for a romantic relationship with the mother of their child. It was felt that cultural practices create difficulty for a family to be formed. It also appeared that, at times, these practices were experienced as a punishment or a 'one way blame game'. Sipho felt that lobola was not a fair practice that considers both parties. He felt that it was the reason that many black marriages don't happen, as it is taxing and overrides true love:

> And at that time you genuinely love your family but you have no means to, to trade in terms of payments for those so called damages, as if maybe when you were sleeping together it was a one way road… I believe lobola is something that makes it hard for people that love each other to be together. That's why you find a lot of black sisters are not married because of such of such methodologies like lobola… should be really as effortless, you know the best things in life should be free you know so. I believe it's just a African dumb practice, it makes things difficult (Sipho).

Contrary to Sipho, Thato saw value in the practice of lobola, as he felt that it was the proper way to families in matrimony. However, he was cautious about it being too expensive and thus turning into a 'trade for love'. He did not, however, have high regards for damages:

> You find out to say those two people they're in love. But now why they have to say a guy have to pay a damage? And those two people they're in love. So a damage is very useless for me…The only thing they can say it's lobola. And lobola is not a thing whereby they say they have to sell their child, no. Lobola is to say that those two people fall in love in a correct way ne, and then they tell the ancestors you see things

> are like this are like this. Not to say this child we need R40 000. We need R50 000. You are selling that person (Thato).

Themba expressed that he did not understand the reasoning behind lobola and felt that it contributes to father absenteeism:

> Ja 'izinto ezisilimazayo lezo izinto ezisilimazayo ngoba' [Those are the things that hamper us. Those are the things that hamper us because] they gonna tell you my child is 'Ufundile' [educated]. So what is the reason that 'Ufundile?' [she's educated]. 'Umama angithi wuwe vele afanele umfundise umntwanawako. Bazokutjela ukuthi you must pay lobola' [You are a mother it is your duty to educate your child. Then they're going to tell you that you must pay lobola]. You must pay 'inhlauwla' [damages]. Hao. It's there then the fathers vele they disappear sometimes most of them (Themba).

Thato also expressed ambivalence around certain cultural practices. He felt that lobola did not guarantee a permanent binding agreement and thus his skepticism:

> It affects a lot. A lot, a lot. 'Cause now you know if you wish to do something like this, you even think I'll do this and then after three four years she leave me, I will do this and this after six or seven years, she's with someone...To say okay they were married in two years down the line, now they're claiming a divorce (Thato).

Tshepo also did not trust the practice in terms of it guaranteeing that the marriage bargain would be upheld. However, he also felt that the payment of damages would not guarantee him access to his child: "Even if I have to pay damages, but after damages, chances of me not seeing my daughter again they're very high. I mean of they don't like me anymore, they'll take her away from me. Paying it or not paying it is still the same. But because it's what they believe in, we just have to do it" (Tshepo).

Most of the men who were interviewed felt that cultural practices that demand money from the father directly cause fathers to be absent. There was also a sense that in cases of parental separation fathers lack rights to their children. Jabu felt that cultural laws did not permit co-

parenting in the case of a separation. His belief in these traditions appeared to make it difficult for him to imagine other ways to access his children. He felt that if these rules did not exist fathers would have a better chance of being present in their children's lives:

> Yes, this is our wish to see them. But because of our cultural norms sometimes we follow the cultural norms that is distancing us from the kids. Because they say if your ex-love has got another relationship with another man, maybe they've moved in together or they've married, then they'll tell you that please stop visiting those kids because you are causing a problem to their current marriage. So it's a difficult thing…It would be good if those things weren't there. It would be good for us to access our kids (Jabu).

Tshepo also felt that cultural practices created distance between father's and their children with rules to be followed and long timelines to be adhered to:

> So with us it's like you have to wait six months. You have to wait and pay, what's this, "hohlaola" [damages] you know, you know, you have to follow all those procedures. They don't wanna see you. You have to send your parents before you even come see that baby or whatever. So it's a process (Tshepo).

5.2.2. <u>Lack of control over decision making</u>

The men interviewed experienced a number of emotions with regards to their absenteeism. Anger towards their children's mother was common. They felt powerless, with the sense that they are not able to fight for their children. They appeared to feel that they held no ability to change their situation, which absolved them of any blame and responsibility. Sipho was still grappling with his absent fatherhood status and appeared to be experiencing a sense of disbelief, feeling mentally preoccupied with the possibilities of what he would could or could not be. He expressed an immense helplessness around the fact that even after trying to do the right thing he did not have control over the outcome:

> That's just absurd. It's totally heart breaking. And shocking. It's astonishing every time I think, it just brings a lot of emotions like why would a mother do this to their own child? Why? Uh…it… it makes me fantasize about moments with my kid that I didn't have, so Ja it's heart breaking. Quite disturbing. You could have flashbacks of

> how it was with your family so it's really something I didn't choose. You know and I tried to do the right thing when she fell pregnant… it was unplanned, we were very young and I tried to do the right thing, fathering the kid,…and you know since we were loving each other and everything it was just the right thing. So whatever has happened now is really totally not what I intended, not what I signed up for and I have no control over it. Which means now I have to go to courts, just to, to…for matters of the heart. Which is really disturbing. It's disturbing (Sipho).

Jabu expressed a feeling of having no choice but to stick with his child's mother's decision to not only not be involved in his child's life but for him never to be known as the biological father. He felt obliged to relinquish power and control to a step father, even though he disagreed with the decision. Even after his child passed away, there was a feeling that he could not choose to disclose even if wanted to for the sake of having the opportunity to obtain closure around his child's passing:

> I respected the mother's decision...I will respect your decisions by not disclosing to the kid that I'm the father…So now I asked the lady to go and see the grave she said no. That doesn't control by me that is controlled by her step father. But I said the stepfather, why? What about the stepfather that came in our relationship with the kid? Because she knows exactly that it's not his kid it's my kid. Why can't you allow me to visit the graveyard? She say no. Okay! I just took it like that so at least I know what happened (Jabu).

Tshepo also relinquished the decision making to his child's mother, as well as to his own mother. He appeared to struggle to take any action against them when he felt he disagreed with them and now blames them for his lack of relationship with his child:

> So she didn't want me to go. To bring the baby anything ok fine we just left it. And I asked my mom so what's the way forward. She said just wait and see…So that again I could say I blame both my mom and girlfriend's mom…I tried to even go see her from day one but they didn't want (Tshepo).

Despite a wish for his child to return to him, Tshepo appears to manage his feelings of rejection and possible ambivalence about taking on a role as father by following advice to 'wait and see' as opposed to making clear efforts to become a part of his child's life:

> Ja, now that the mother blocked me on Whatsapp, Facebook, I don't have contact. I don't have the chance of saying sorry even though I don't know what I did. You know I know where she stays I know where she lives but my mom, my brothers and cousins, they think that it better I let it be. Until when she wants to come back. She'll come back. I want her to be happy naturally. Not because I fought for her and all of that. Ja you know, it's not gonna be easy for them, for her grandmother to let things be…okay but, I don't mind waiting. But when she grows up I think she will have to ask questions, what happened? (Tshepo).

Thato also seemed to be struggling with feelings of rejection. Despite reporting a 'friendly relationship with his child's mother since their separation: "Eish you know we're just like friends. Friends who meet in the street, hello how are you? Hey I haven't seen you for the past three months where were you, you see it was like that" (Thato), he expressed a sense that his child was taken away from him: "I did live with the child. The child disappear when she was two years old… It seems like she's [the child's mother] pushing me away" (Thato).

Tshepo expressed that he was willing to wait until his child and their mother make contact, but also expressed a wish to take action to change his situation. This seemed to be an idealized thought, as his feelings appeared to oscillate during the interview between anger and resignation:

> If they happen not to give me a chance, then I'm taking them to court. And taking them to, I wouldn't mind if they say I have to pay 2000 I'll pay it. 3000 I'll pay it. She might as well take my money. As long as I have connection with my daughter I'm happy. It's not about money. It's about love that the child needs from her father. When it comes to your child, you make it a point that when she needs this you give, when they want this you give. Don't have to think about anything. some even go to debt cause of their children. But for a father to be there, the father has to provide. No matter how, he has to. Like it or not. He has to (Tshepo).

However, despite this commitment to fight for access to his child, Thato appeared to feel the fight would be in vain and that he would not gain access: “I’ve tried. So, so I find that so difficult cause now I was thinking that although I can’t have those contact, speaking to my child, it will be nice, but at the very same time I won’t see him. So at the very same time it’s useless” (Thato).

While many of the participants appeared to position themselves as victims of circumstance and helpless against the wishes of the child’s mother or maternal family, at points in the interviews, some of the men were able to acknowledge their agency and responsibility. There were points at which there was an awareness of how they ended up being absent and acceptance of their roles in this and the effects of being absent. Jabu acknowledged that he does in fact have power and control as a father and that it is somewhat of a choice to be an absent father:

> But I wouldn’t say God intervene. God gave us a choice. God is just looking at us and saying ‘Oh it’s up to you if you take this route. I’ll never bring you up, I’ll never take you to the right direction. You must take your own right direction’. God gave us everything, eyes, legs, mind to think, everything, but you end up misusing them…then you decide your own fate. You decide your own death(Jabu).

Likewise Tshepo reflected on the options available to him to try to gain contact with his child’s mother, which he has not taken up. He appeared resigned and seems to have accepted the way things are:

> She blocked me, and then I lost my phone I lost her numbers, I lost her mother’s numbers, I lost the baby I lost everything. I lost, I don’t know how to get back to, I even thought of finding someone to chat to her on Facebook and give her the numbers so I can have them. You know how it is, you even have nasty thoughts, thinking that you’d go there and talk to her and all of that, but again she showed me that she doesn’t care anymore. She doesn’t want me to be part of my daughter’s life. She said it straight to me (Tshepo).

Thato took responsibility for what he deemed to be a choice he feels that he and other absent fathers have made to not be active in their children’s lives: “We don’t care. We don’t care in

most of the time you see. We do things whereby we regret at the end of the day. 'Cause we telling ourselves that we are a man. No one can tell us. So actually we are the ones making women to suffer you see. But we don't see it cause we are the one who doing it" (Thato).

5.2.3. Absent fathers as victims

Participants experienced their absence from their children's lives as mentally and emotionally consuming, worrying and as preoccupying their lives. They felt it was painful not to have daily contact with their children and felt they had no control over access. Many indicated that it was mothers' responsibility to make sure that things happen the correct way, which appeared to contribute to their lack of agency and absolve the fathers of blame and responsibility. Most of the participants felt that there was nothing they could do to gain access. Sipho expressed that having lost access to his child was a huge daily struggle for him and that he often felt that he might lose control of his emotions. He blamed his absent father status on the mother of his child:

> I have to have…the emotional intelligence to, to sustain my personal life daily, go to work and also my emotions I need to control them so that they don't overwhelm me and take me out of my focus on what I want to do, or my goals and my dreams…So I'm absent because of someone else not because I want to be(Sipho).

Jabu presented himself as being a gentle person whose nature has been taken advantage of. It seemed that because of his nature he felt he could not do anything to prevent or change the way things are. He felt he was a victim of circumstance where his wish to have contact with his child was blocked by the complication of not having control over where and how this happens. Adding to his pain and suffering is the fact that he is assisting to raise children who are not his biological children, which appeared to be a constant reminder of what he would like to be doing for his own children:

> I'm a very soft heart person, I didn't hold any grudge against her, I just say Oh okay that's fine. You have moved on I cannot do anything. I can't reverse anything…It's a painful issue because sometimes I can say things doesn't permit you to…to have that kid, that you, you have. To have a daily contact. A daily contact doesn't mean you speak over the phone. To see each other physically and be with her and tell her about the life in general. That's what worries me. Because the lady that we got a kid with,

> she's still staying in her parent's home and then you know I cannot visit them regularly there, although I've got my own place, she doesn't want to come over. It was a painful issue because sometimes this thing are eating you inside that I've got kids and I'm looking after other peoples' kids, what about mine? Mmm (Jabu).

Tshepo felt that he was a victim of poor decision-making on the part of the maternal family. He reported that he has now left it up to his child to one day correct the situation, as he feels that his family and child's mother have not taken enough action, resulting in his absent father status. He reported the deep emotional effect this has had on him:

> But again in my culture, the girl's family could've came to my house before telling me, before giving birth, but they didn't. And…I knew but the family didn't come… I blame this culture thing. I blame my parents…Ja I mean even if I blame again, I blame the granny for like saying I'm her uncle…I cry every day you know before I sleep, I pray to God that wherever she is, "abe happy man" [she must be happy]. It's painful I don't even know what to say. So…maybe my daughter will one day ask what happened, I'll tell her everything, I still think that my mom, I say I blame my, the mother of my daughter um they are not taking initiative or maybe they don't even want to know how it feels to have a father. I blame women, I blame all the mothers that don't do anything about their children not having good communication with their fathers. I totally blame them" (Tshepo).

A common theme in the interviewees' narratives was the sense that the absent father status had "happened" to them. They seemed fairly preoccupied with their own suffering due to being absent and little focus was found. On the effects or pain their children may be experiencing. At times, there was mention of their worry and concern for their children's well-being. However, they felt powerless to protect their children and appeared to long for the opportunity to protect their children from the pain they've experienced.

The participants expressed a wish to have a different their relationship with their children. Sipho reported a wish to see his child grow in front of him and have daily contact: "I wish he was growing up by my side… I wish I could touch him every day…Me seeing him just every day is the wish" (Sipho). Tshepo also wished he could make sure that his child is provided for and emotionally okay and being properly cared for by her caretakers:

> I wish I had a chance to do that to my daughter but unfortunately I couldn't or I can't because of some circumstances via family wise and all of that…I mean going to bed everyday not knowing what your kid did eat, or what she's wearing, is she happy wherever she is. Is she enjoying the relationship with her mother you know? You wish so many things (Tshepo).

Tshepo also reflected on his own relationship with his father where he acknowledged what he did not have and how he would like that experience to be different for him and his daughter. He would like to be the attentive and very involved father that he did not have:

> I never stand a chance with my dad…but if you spend time with her and she believes that she's having a good time with you, it's easy for her to talk to you. That's when you'll know what's happening in her life. Which guy she's meeting, when are her periods…without communication there's no love, I mean you communicate with your daughter or your child, that's where love grows…I wanna be a guy, a father that pays for everything, her fees (Tshepo).

Themba also appeared to have been deeply affected by not having a father himself, and his ultimate goal is to prevent his son having the same painful experience. He reported feeling determined to remain hopeful that things will one day change. He explained that he fantasizes about the little things he wished him and his father could have done and experienced and how he would like to be able to do these things with his own child and build a close connection. He is adamant that his son must know his efforts as his father, and is willing to make any sacrifices needed to achieve this:

> I told my girlfriend, I said, you know what I don't have a father. I don't want my son to grow up with not have a father… So I don't want to 'Ngingathin'? Ukulahlela "ithawela' [what can I say? Give up hope], ya 'Angifun' ukulahlela ithawela ngomtanawam'[I don't want to give up on my child] 'Ngoba nam' ngikhule ngingana ubaba, ngege ngimyekele naye akhule angina ubaba'[Because I also grew up without a father, I won't leave him to also grow up without him having a father]…I feel so terrible. Terrible because sometimes I want to take my child to the park, to the zoo…That one my father didn't take me. Take my child to everywhere that my father

> didn't want to take me…Eh it's not good. It's not good at all because a child is gonna see that you not supporting mara [but] he see the plastic they're coming, my mother bought me…He gonna say also my father is supporting me only. You must support your child, he gonna see you supporting him…Our fathers they were not supporting us. So us, we tolding us to say if I have a child I'll support them until they die. When they say they're sick, I'm gonna take the money. If you want to eat them you are gonna eat them, mara [but] me I want to support my child, until I die (Themba).

While there is a longing for paternal lineage bond with their children, the fact that these fathers cannot be fathers in the perhaps somewhat idealized sense that they wish they could be, seems to prevent them from trying to find other ways to be fathers to their children. Thato appeared to feel that the only circumstance standing in between him having a relationship with his child and being active in his child's life is the fact that they do not live together. He also seemed to have suppressed any positive emotion he may have for his child, as it is too painful to bear: "I can wish to say you know my child, he can be here. Cause I'm not like running away from responsibility. If my child was here, I should stand with my two feet and do each and every thing he needs. But now 'cause he's not around me, I don't care. I don't care. I don't even think to say I have to take care for someone who's not around" (Thato).

Themba wished that his child had the freedom or deciding power to have contact with him. He reported longing for a close relationship, where his child has a connection with both sides of his family: "Me I want my child if he wants to come to me, he must come to me. Me I come to them we have a good relationship with my child…I want to stay with my father. One day, because he grow up at his home. He know people at home not his father's people" (Themba).

5.3. Historical and current contextual influences

Under the overarching theme of historical and current contextual influences of absent fatherhood, there were sub-themes such as father readiness, negative childhood experiences of fatherhood, external, racial and environmental influences on fatherhood and justice system powerlessness that participants felt contributed to them becoming absent fathers.

5.3.1. Father readiness

All of the men interviewed for this study became fathers at a young age and it seems were not prepared for fatherhood. It was a frightening, overwhelming experience, though some of the participants reported becoming used to the idea. Once digested, fatherhood looked possible to handle. They felt that it is more difficult for black men to be first time fathers, and they linked the associated stress, and anxiety with a lack of resources and support. Many described realization around the seriousness of fatherhood. Sipho expressed how although becoming a father was not intended, it was something he eventually got used to and considered to be positive:

> I was 23…It was quite scary because it wasn't planned and everything, but it was, I mean, after I think time it was actually a blessing. Ja it wasn't something out of the ordinary. And it was okay it was actually breath taking. It's, it was nothing that I really feared you know. At least I could take care of myself so I could take care of my family (Sipho).

Although Sipho was eventually comfortable with the idea, he was still aware of the big responsibility he was faced with having to become a parent:

> The challenges, if you, it's just surviving you know and having a steady job and putting food on the table, uh getting your kids into school, proper school. You know providing safe transport for them, safety. I think those are just the challenges in South Africa. Safety of your kids, good school, good education and uh surviving, poverty (Sipho).

Tshepo's experience of what made it difficult to assume the responsibility of fatherhood was the fact that being unemployed meant he could not take care of himself or his family: "I was 23…I wasn't working at that time…So it was difficult" (Tshepo). Themba emphasized that not having support as a new father was challenging and how the shock of becoming a father while not having the financial means was difficult. It appeared to have been a frightening and distressing experience:

> So you were 24…I was not working ne. It was not good, you don't have a job. Your friend have a job. Your friends there are these mothers and fathers are supporting him. Me no one support me…He said I'm pregnant. I said don't tell me lies. He said, truth, I'm pregnant. Yoh! (laughs)…I couldn't believe. I don't smoke ne but daar [there] I

> take a cigarette, I smoke…I was shaking and breaking a glass of water…I pray outside at the gate I said 'Father, just allow me, I need this job now'…I was scared and stressed…You can't play with that (Themba).

Thato had a different experience in that he reported feeling excited about becoming a father. However, he also was aware of the amount of planning needed for him to take responsibility. He also felt that what he could provide was not good enough for his child or the mother of his child as his financial capabilities could only achieve the bare minimum:

> I was 26…When I became a father it was so nice man. It was so nice, 'cause I didn't have a problem with my kid. You know actually it grows my mind before time as I, 'cause in each and everything I used to do I use to think first my kid, if I can do like this and like this. I was planning forward you see…she fell in love with another guy. I was not working by that time. I was working the piece jobs. But I was providing food. That's all that I can provide. To say at least, you know if there is no food at home, that house is very cold. You see, so I was providing food, I was a making sure to say they're staying in a comfortable home (Thato).

All of the fathers having been young when they became fathers suggests that perhaps if they were older and their lives had been at a point where they felt financially and emotionally prepared, it would've been easier to take on the responsibility. Participants also alluded to the idea that some of the pregnancies had been unwanted, as well as unplanned. There was a sense of feeling forced into fatherhood. Some of the participants suggested that their partners fell pregnant without warning, when they were not ready and understood this to have contributed to their current status as absent fathers. Sipho felt, that in general, men become absent fathers possibly due to having many relationships and that women 'trick' men into becoming fathers. There was a sense of blaming the women for putting them in this situation when they were not prepared for fatherhood:

> But my assumption could be uh maybe multiple relationships? One. Unplanned pregnancies, two…Maybe they don't love the mother…because maybe poverty or I think some of our, our black sisters might be pregnant to trap uh guys. And the guy might not be there…family planning is there for a reason. You know and if, if people are selfish, women falling pregnant to trap the guy and the guy's not there, you cannot

> force him to be there. You cannot force him to father the child. It happens now that the child will be fatherless (Sipho).

Jabu echoed this feeling of being tricked or trapped into a pregnancy he did not want: "You must know that I'm pregnant, "hao?", so now? Because I spoke to her that you must understand please, I'm studying, eh take care of yourself. She say no, I've swallowed my, my, uh, my pills…I said now why this, because I spoke to you several times that please don't forget the tablets that you were telling me" (Jabu). Themba expressed not ever wanting to be a father but taking on the responsibility for the sake of his grandmother who wanted grandchildren: "…but I said me I don't want to be a father me. You, I don't have father, so why I supposed to be with someone with my child? So I saw there that I must be a father when my grandmother told me he want to touch all my children. So I must do something right for my grandmother, he do something right for me (Themba).

Overall, the narratives revealed difficulty adjusting to unplanned pregnancies, mixed feelings around fatherhood and resulting tension with regards to wanting to be involved in their children's lives.

5.3.2 Negative childhood experiences of fatherhood

All over men who were interviewed experienced various forms of absentee fatherhood in their relationships with their own fathers. For the most of the participants, their relationships with their fathers remains distant to date. Some reported physical separation from their fathers and others reported their fathers as being emotionally unavailable. However, their narratives expressed that they are aware that fatherhood is more than just physical presence. Many mixed feelings towards fathers were reported. Thato related a sad experienced of childhood. He was abandoned by both parents and while he seemed to have been taken care of by extended family and various members of the community, he only learned the reasons behind his parents' decision to leave him later. This appeared to have been very painful for him:

> My mom…ey she was a drunk too. So you know my mom, they've departed with my father I don't know when. My mom fell in love with another guy, and that guy took my mom to (location), you see. In whereby I find out the story late in like three four years to say my mom live in (location)… people in the area. So they did accept me ok I did grow up there and you know when the times goes on, they tell me to say, now

> you are man enough. You have to man up yourself. To find out hey, those people they're telling me the truth. Cause you know I think I used to have three, four grandfathers on that street…I live there for many years…Cause when that father told me all those stories, he end up saying I can give you one year three months, I remember, he said one year three months… I was nineteen years old (Thato).

Jabu's experience of his father ill-treating both his mother and his siblings appeared to result in a great deal of anger towards his father, His narrative revealed paternal connections s rejecting:

> Ei, I had a very bad experience of my father. My father was not a very good person at all. He was good outside but not inside to his kids and his wife. He was always beating up my mother in front of us you know, and then I grew up having that anger of retaliating for the mother in the pa, in the future…Really, even when we were meeting somewhere he couldn't even greet me. Mmm, so before he died he wanted us to come back and I say no. It wasn't worth our while (Jabu).

Tshepo reported that his father only provided financially. He appeared to feel very rejected by his father's lack of interest in him. This appeared to have influenced him to want be a father who is very interested in his children as people and their interests:

> Argh mm, I mean grade five I was young. There wasn't a connection. He was just there to buy me clothes, food everything cause I needed that when I was young you know… The only thing that he knows is my name. I don't think he knows what colour I love, everything. So he was never there…Never called maybe just to take me out you know, have fun, all of those things. So I don't have a relationship with him. I don't even think I'll ever have it with him. 'Cause it's too late, I mean I'm 26 now and he's about fifty something. Of which I mean it's too late. I tried, when, last year I went to him and was like I don't want your money. Okay you're rich and whatever but I don't want that. I just want you to spend time with me. You know take me out. Ask me who am I? What do I do? What's happening in my life? But he was like hey bra, not me (Tshepo).

It appeared difficult for some of the participants to understand the reasons or their fathers' rejection of them. There was a wish for paternal love from their own fathers, which, at times,

appeared to make their own absentee father status that much more painful. Tshepo was directly rejected by his father without any explanation which he experienced as dismissive and cold:"…and he just told me that hey bra, It's impossible you're not my child. That's what he said. I'm not his kid, I'm not his blood, to just forget about that" (Tshepo). Themba reported still desiring a relationship with his father and appeared to be painfully in touch with the lasting effects having an absent father has had on him:

> My father has a young brother…He say you are supposed to go and see your father…I'm gonna go. And the one thing I'm gonna ask him, why he didn't come all this time to see me, only. I want that answer nje. Why? I know he's gonna blame my mother because he's passed away, but me I don't care, I want to know why. So sometimes you see the boy, they are playing their soccer there in the street, so you see his father is watching them. So me, who's gonna watch me? It's my grandmother? (Themba).

The difficult experiences that Themba had with his father seemed to have left him with a negative view of fatherhood. He appeared to regard fatherhood as a terrible responsibility or punishment:

> There's no one that's not gonna wanna be a father. There's no one because this things its God who's doing that. He punish you with a child. If if you can read the bible, the god say I will 'NgesiZulu uthi, Ngizoshaya Izugulu ngezugulwane zenu, yabo ukuthi akashayi bona abo mama nabo baba? Ngizoshaya abantwana guphela' [In isiZulu they say, I will punish the parents through their children and grandchildren. Do you see He doesn't punish them, the mother and fathers? I will punish the children only] (Themba).

In this very mixed statement above, it is not clear who Themba feels God is punishing-the father through the child or the child through the father. It might be that he identifies with the feeling of punishment he imagined that his father felt about having a child, it also suggests a sense of having been punished as a child for his father's 'sins'.

5.3.3. External, racial and environmental influences on fatherhood

The participants felt that they needed a lot of resources to survive. They were financially insecure and afraid of possibly not being able to provide when having other family members to support. Sipho felt that fathers had to be business savvy as well as put themselves in a good educational and financial position if they were to become adequate fathers:

> It could be hard in terms of you know market shares, surviving in whatever you're trying to do. It's a bit difficult here in South Africa to survive without education, or, or ,or means of putting food on the table, so you're not educated, or you're not business oriented or you're not an entrepreneur you…it's quite scary being a father in South Africa (Sipho).

Themba felt that men may already have other responsibilities that make it difficult for them to provide as fathers:

> When ne someone come to you and this month you have plans for that money. You buy, buy, buy, so you want to save that month, someone's gonna come. Maybe it's your sister's child he said hey 'malome' [uncle] can you please borrow me money. It's tough. It's very, very tough because you must take that money, you must do another money again…we have many family (Themba).

Many of the participants spoke about environmental influences on fatherhood where, if given better opportunities it would make it easier to be present fathers. They felt that being previously disadvantaged still affects their abilities to provide and felt systemically powerless. There was a sense that not having had a generational passing down of wealth left them powerless to change their families futures. They felt they had been given a raw deal. Sipho felt that the area in which a child is raised played a big role in how fatherhood is affected:

> I think it depends on the location…if, if, if I'm Black and raising a family in the township, that might be a bit, it's a bit challenging, I mean there's so much. I mean the townships is so diverse, its dynamic…it's not private, so next door's fatherhood could be broadcasted, you know into the street for instance…I mean you don't find whites in townships…its different in a way that since it's a suburb you have, you can, you private and I'm sure when you're in your house, or household you, your kids are

there with you. You know most of the time they're not playing the streets, so you can have more time to be with them. You can give them more time…limited things that the kids attention might be taking so you might bond with your kids better (Sipho).

Themba felt that black fathers specifically were disadvantaged more than other racial groups as most of them do not have trust funds passed down to them when they become fathers that could make the transition easier. He felt that because they were financially systematically hindered, the knowledge and capability they possess to become better fathers is hampered:

The White, India, Coloured, if their child they're coming to be born, already that child they have the account. So you, you don't have an account, Black people. So the child of the White people, the Coloured, the Indian has an account there cause when they are saving the money…but they are earn more. You see most of the time, the Hindus, his father, maybe the grand grandfather, there's a company. You they are taking the company to the house, home. If he passed away this one gets it. If passed away, this one gets it. Even the White people they are doing that…But if we had that power…No one's gonna suffer. So God make His things the way he wanna make it. Mara [but] end of the day us Black people we have more information, but by the Whites and the Hindus and the Coloureds…We know more us (Themba).

Sipho felt that absenteeism mainly affected Black men and that this was also depicted in the media:

You know some of them lie and say I don't have any kids just to have the full support of this current wife so, it does create a lot of problems where uh such problems, you should talk about such problems of 'utatakho' [South African Television show about absent fathers] and 'Khumulaekhaya' [South African television show about split up families] you know, it's only for blacks if you, if you know (Sipho).

Tshepo felt that Black families did not prioritise the role and presence of a father as much as other racial groups did that this is the reason that there are so many absent fathers in the Black community:

> I mean okay looking at the whites its even if they break up and whatever, it doesn't involve their children. You know even if it the very first time when she's giving birth, the first person she thinks of is the father. Come see his daughter or son. But with Blacks we have these things that are damaging us… Like I said it before, Whites, coloureds they don't have that uh they don't follow culture. Like if she's giving birth today, he's the first guy to know before the family (Tshepo).

5.3.4. Justice system powerlessness

The participants felt that the justice system was unhelpful and that they had no legal support with regards to assisting them to be part of their children's lives, when they were being prevented. They felt that the legal route is complicated and difficult as the justice system is not doing enough to help their situation. Sipho felt that fathers who want to be in their children's lives were not backed up by the justice system as it favours the mother. He also felt that it was not efficient:

> I just think the justice system is just a bit slow…the mother of my child is actually hiding my kid. So, for, for, there's certain laws that are really biased to, to uh against fathers and I think that should be visited and you know it should be taken seriously that when a woman hides a…Actually each and every parent, when a parent hides their kid away from the other parent its wrong. It should be, it should be remediated immediately you know, it takes time here in South Africa…I just think court takes more time, it takes too much time. It could take a year for the order to be to be made you know (Sipho).

Themba expressed his desperation at gaining access to his child and attempting to go through the correct channels to no avail which led him to take matters into his own hands:

> Until me I pass maybe there in the street I saw my child he's there. I take them. I was taking them last of last year. They calling the police…Ja you see so we gonna arrest you for taking a child without telling his mother and his grandmother. You see vader [Father/Policemen], I told the police you see you can take me ne as you want to take me and beat me if you want to beat me mara [but] this is my child. If I want to see him they stopping me to see my child…'Thatha izinywaozako uzifake ecqathulwen' zam', uzwe ukuthi kunjane ungab' nomntana wako ufisa ukuba nomntana wako'

[Take yourself and place yourself in my shoes and feel howit feels not to be with your child when you wish to be with your child]. 'Babona lapho bathi ok mele siyoyenza istatement' [That's when they saw that ok we need to go make a statement]. They taking me and his mother statement [Name of police station]. 'Ngabala ngabala ukuthi ne ngifuna ukubona umntwanawam' nga Friday until Sunday' [I wrote I want to see my child from Friday until Sunday]. His mother said okay. I asked the police that why 'nizovumela umama we ntombazana ukuthi okay, ngifuna abale umama womtwana ukuthi ok umntwana angeza Friday until Sunday, bathi kuyafana. Ngathi akufani ngoba angegebang'vumele'. [Why do you allow the grandmother to say okay. I want the child's mother to write that the child can come from Friday until Sunday. They said it's all the same. I said it's not all the same because they won't allow me]. Since, once, twice then they stopped (Themba).

5.4. Influences of maternal gate-keeping

5.4.1. Mothers as gatekeepers

The participants experienced the mothers of their children as gatekeepers. They felt that once the relationship with the child's mother went wrong and if they had hurt or upset the mother there were consequences. When the romantic relationships ended so did their relationships with their children. Sipho felt that the reason the mother of his child was preventing him from having a relationship with their child was due her still being affected by how their relationship ended:

> Ah well the mother is bitter…is trying to hurt my feelings obviously…I'm sure it's a selfish move in the mother's side and she will probably get an epiphany later that she was doing such a thing so, that's just the reason that if I cannot be with her I cannot be with my son too…Uh this year basically always just asking, always just trying to re-link with my son but Ja, she's still as bitter as she was in the beginning (Sipho).

Themba reported that his child's mother gave him the impression that all that was required from him as a father was financial provision. Despite providing this, he felt that he was not granted access to his child due to having ended the relationship with his the mother of his child:

> …is the mother of my child…when I go ne to, to buy my child maybe some toys, I want to see him. He don't want me to see my child…he said he don't want to check my child you know he said send your things only. Send the money, send the clothes, food only. You give me a stress. I give you a stress. So that's why you must cheat? Ok sharp I will support my child. He said to me you'll see about that…Most of the time it's the mothers ne. when they are starting fighting with his father of the child, they say don't come back here…So I call the mother, the mother must give, hello can I talk with my [Childs name] my son is [sons name]. Eh let me check, he's sleeping yazi [you know] (Themba).

Some of the participants struggled to acknowledge other potential reasons for the mother's reactions. They did not seem able to reflect on their roles in breakdowns in communication when having to negotiate access to their child**.** There was a minimization of their own wrong-doings. Sipho casually mentioned the fact that there had been domestic violence in his relationship, which he may not have been as sensitive about as his ex-partner would have liked him to be:

> She think that maybe I did something terribly wrong to this woman because when she heard my story that no everything was alright, all rosy growing up in suburbs you know, what has happened now that this woman is so bitter. And I told her I don't know really because we broke up. And we didn't break up in a sense of infidelity or her catching me with another woman in bed no it was purely a sense of misunderstanding each other, which caused, which lead to domestic violence which is an everyday thing it escalated in a way you know what its best for us to separate. We now disrespecting each other, no infidelity no nothing like that. So she though no I did something to her and she didn't entertain my story and then she didn't entertain me as the lawyer who I wanted her to actually let us get this thing going. So it's actually quite difficult this thing of domestic issue (Sipho).

Thato was also dismissive about the things that have led the mother of his child to be upset enough for her to want to withhold their child from him: "Cause I tell her to say, meanwhile you still have that mind to say all those years, you are talking about past tense. Me I'm talking about the present tense. So you are talking about past tenses so let's leave it…So the

grudge it won't work. It won't work" (Thato). Tshepo also struggled to acknowledge that his partner may have felt forced to have a baby that she didn't want:

> She was happy but she was angry at the same time that I did it intentionally. I was like how can you say that? Then we spoke about it then she was happy but then she still had that mind set of aborting our baby. And then, I didn't want her to do that. She wanted me to give her money, I delayed time. I was just not that kinda guy I mean I wouldn't kill a precious kid who doesn't know anything about what happened or what's happening in this world… I don't even believe in this thing that it was a mistake. I mean when we do it we knew chances of you falling pregnant were high (Tshepo).

Despite a general sense of the dismissal of the mothers' experiences, there was some acknowledgement that their ex-partners could be angry. They knew that there were expectations of them, but that they may have somewhat ignored these responsibilities. Themba acknowledged some of the things that could upset mothers and lead them to cutting fathers off from their children: "Ok I'm gonna blame the fathers maybe the mothers they saw them they're cheating, that is why they told him don't come back here yes. Maybe the other one this month he didn't come with the grocery of the child so the mother told him don't come back here"(Themba). However, Tshepo shifted the blame to the mother of his child while acknowledging that he was aware of what was expected of him butnot taking responsibility of seeing these through:

> Cause today she doesn't want anything to do with me which amazes me. Why? Cause I didn't do anything to anyone. If yes, they wanted me to pay damages, they could've said it straight. It's not my side or my decision to make. It's their decision if they want my mom or my family to go there they should say so. It's not my mom or for me to find out or whatever no. I mean like I said it's their duty to come to my house, introduce the daughter, and take it from there. It's not my family's duty to go there. I think. Yeah (Tshepo).

Many of the participants insinuated that the child seemed to have brought on the problems in their romantic relationship. Sipho implied that before the pregnancy both him and his partner had everything going for them that was disrupted by having a child:

> Before the child was born it was great, we were still young uh, ambitious, adventurous, you know newly lovers. And when the child was born that multiplied, you know in, you know in truly it was marvellous it was great. Family, you know uh destiny and then ja all hell broke loose (laughs) (Sipho).

Tshepo felt that his relationship with his child's mother was amazing before the pregnancy which however, may have been somewhat idealized: "Uhm me and my girl we used to be the best. The relationship was awesome. It was, we used to play we used to do everything before she was pregnant. Uhm we used to be, they used to call us the best couple ever" (Tshepo).
Participants' new partners were also blamed for a lack of access to their children. Jabu felt that these new partners could be gatekeepers:

> Anything, it's also about the current person you are living with. Facing a challenge that she doesn't even allow you to have your contact with your kids. She'll tell you that no what do you want there because you no longer together. It means now you want to go back to the mother. That's the problem that we are facing (Jabu).

5.4.2. <u>Maternal family as gatekeepers</u>

Some of these fathers resorted to underhanded tactics to see their children, especially when they felt that the maternal family acted as gatekeepers towards them. Sipho knowing that the maternal family does not want him to see his child has resorted to arriving unannounced and trying to see his child without their permission in the street if he is lucky:

> I went there where he lives and surprise visit and I spoke to him and ja, the family saw me and they chased you away…The family chased me away. Ja basically they're cutting all contact ties to the kid as possible…And they'll give me excuses you know. So I have to surprise visit hoping he's outside the yard or something like that (Sipho).

Themba reported a similar situation where he resorted to taking his child from the street without the mother's or family's knowledge as they have prevented him access: "Until me I pass maybe there in the street I saw my child he's there. I take them. I was taking them last of last year. They calling the police…" (Themba).

Fathers felt that the maternal family holds the power of access to their child. Some felt that they did not meet the requirements the maternal family had for them as partners and fathers. Sipho felt that what he needed was to gain the support of the maternal family as they hold the key to possibly change the way things are: “So now I’ve actually got the family members uh uhm the family, brothers and sisters of the, the girlfriend I’ve got their support so ja I’m gonna try that. And if that doesn’t happen I’m gonna go back to court” (Sipho). Tshepo felt that the maternal family had standards that fathers did not meet and regardless of what his partner wants, the family would not allow any contact with the mother of the child or his child and she would not fight this decision as families have the deciding power:

> The problem I think it was her mother. You know when you have a daughter who’s successful you look at other people down. You look at them like ah what’s he gonna do to my daughter. What’s he gonna provide you know… She wanted us to fix things and all of that and I said ok its fine. But the problem is the family is still, they’re still cross because my mom told them that I am not working. If the parents doesn’t like the guy, it will be difficult for them, for that guy to have a relationship with his children. Ja I mean if for instance for girls today, they don’t, most of them listen to their family, their parents if they tell them not to do this, they don’t do it. They tell them to do this, they do it (Tshepo).

Themba felt that the maternal family’s wishes and demands had to be met first before he could have any chance with his child or a relationship with his child’s mother which he would still like to have:

> In our culture, when a girl have a baby, you don’t carry his baby when he’s going home, someone must carry his baby. I said I want to carry my baby, it’s the first day. It’s the first day I want to carry my boy. No way no ways… The grandmother, yes his mother said no ways leave this child. You gonna touch this child after you pay the damages. Ja I still have hope. Ok me too I have a hope mara [but]… Mara [but] problem here is his mother… I’ll never take like another girlfriend hai [no]. I want him to come back home. Stay with me, raise our child (Themba).

Fathers were aware of the potency and control the mothers and their families had over allowing the fathers' access to their children or not. They felt that this dynamic played a big part in them being absent fathers.

5.4.3. Conclusion

The participants' offered varying thoughts regarding the idea of fatherhood and absent fatherhood and he various factors that influence how these are constructed. In both their constructions of fatherhood and absent fatherhood the influence of the participants' own personal experiences was evident, not only through their experiences with their own fathers but also through experiences with other significant figures in their lives. Under the theme of constructions of fatherhood, it was clear that this is not a straightforward construction and that there may be agreement and disagreement as to what constitutes a father. The constructions of absent fatherhood exposed why this issue is also not a simple one as well as why it requires in-depth investigation before assumptions can be made. The results also revealed that the topic require sensitivity and empathy as participants expressed a number of painful experiences and at times, fears of being judged. The theme of historical and contextual reasons behind absent fatherhood offered a broader view of the circumstances in which these men become absent in their children's lives. It offered discussion of both how their personal feelings and actions, and contextual factors contribute to their absenteeism. It can then be concluded that although this was a study of only five Black men, the findings offer a perspective that adds to our knowledge of absent fatherhood, and allows for insights that may aid intervention on both individual and broader social levels.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Introduction

This section will discuss the results in relation to wider literature on Black absent fathers and fatherhood. This will include analysis of the commentaries from these Black South African fathers who expressed their range of opinions about absent fatherhood, in relation to previous findings by scholars who have researched and published on Black fatherhood in South Africa. In addition to exploring how these Black men constructed fatherhood and absent fatherhood, this discussion will incorporate how these constructions appear to have influenced their absent father status, as well as how it has left them feeling.

This research draws its theoretical framework from the psychosocial tradition, which requires an interrogation of both social constructionist and psychoanalytic understandings as to why some Black fathers are not present in their children's lives. Psychosocial schools of thought take into consideration both the social and psychological essentials of human experience, which this research has attempted to do by exploring the lived experiences of absent fathers and through exploring the contexts in which these Black South African men live (Clarke, 2002; Clarke 2006). By examining how internalised societal and cultural understandings of fatherhood interact with intrapsychic representations of fatherhood from personal experiences of having been fathered or not, it is possible to explore how these understandings interact to create the participants' personal constructions of fatherhood (Clarke, 2002; Clarke 2006).

6.2. Constructions of fatherhood – both present and absent

In answering the study's first research question regarding constructions of absent fatherhood, it became clear that fatherhood and absent fatherhood are not necessarily always separate constructs, in that many of the participants still considered themselves fathers despite not actively 'fathering'. In previous research conducted, men constructed fatherhood as biological, which is when a man impregnates a woman (Hunter, 2006). This was clear in the current research where participants felt that a man becomes a father when he impregnates a woman and that when this happens it is a lifelong continuation of his legacy. However, some split representations were evident in their constructions, where both devalued and idealized versions of fatherhood emerged. Participants depicted fatherhood as an unwanted, burdening responsibility at times, while at other times as a revered and needed role. They further conceptualized a biological father as someone who completes a family, where his role is as important as a mother, which differed from previous research that found that African belief systems placed less value in a man who gives his sperm and more on the care-taker role, where the role of father could be carried by numerous care-taking males within the extended family (Morrell, 2006).

The participants that constructed fatherhood as biological additionally emphasized the importance of biological father as the care-taker, for example, two of the fathers felt that a child who is adopted can only be provided for to a certain extent. They also did not place much merit on the idea of being a stepfather. Langa, (2010), Morrell, (2006) and Perry, (2009) found that within African culture there are beliefs that fatherhood is about familial and communal ties whether a child was biologically related to a man or not. In disagreement with

this notion, these two participants felt that the biological father should play the parenting role in their child's life, despite that fact that culture prevented them from doing so due to the belief that if a woman remarries, her new partner takes on the father role and the biological father is no longer taken into account.

In their constructions and fatherhood all the participants in the current study stressed the significance of being a financial provider in order to be considered a father. They felt that it is a fathers' duty to put food on the table. This was also found in Mkhize's (2006) study where fathers expressed that a financial provider qualified a man as a father. This belief that a man who can financially provide is what qualifies one as a father was also confirmed in Gadsden, Wortham and Turner's (2003) study which indicated that men who were employed were seven times more likely than unemployed men to be highly involved in their children's lives.

There were additional components to what the participants perceived to define fatherhood. These were things such as a father being someone who gave guidance to his child and being an example of strength. A father was viewed as a very responsible person whose life decisions were always to be respectable. These constructions relate to preceding literature that suggests that fatherhood in the pre-colonial era was interlinked with the social role of being the head of the household and considered a leader and protector (Hunter, 2006; Langa, 2010).

Mavungu et al. (2013), Mkhize (2006) and Perry (2009) speak about fatherhood as being constructed through socio-cultural psychological belief systems which conceptualize identity within social, historical, political and ideological terms, as well as gender based viewpoints which understand fatherhood as socially constructed rather than innate, meaning that fatherhood is largely defined through the social creation and reproduction of masculinities. It is no surprise then that studies like this current one echo literature that has found that, opposite to the mother-child attachment relationship, the paternal relationship can be understood to be 'concealed in culture'. There is an emphasis on the fact that childcare belongs to women and though fatherhood in psychoanalytic concepts has the stronghold of patriarchal privilege, there is a devaluation of the intricacy of men's parental relationships (Freeman, 2008; Ross, 1979). Consequently the above constructions of fatherhood have a heavy emphasis in financial provision with the notion of father as care-taker as an addition, as opposed to an equal component.

It was notable to find that all of the participants in this study gave all credit to the maternal figures in their lives with regards to how they understood what fatherhood should be and the type of fathers they want to be. This was different to the credit solely given to male figures in Hunter (2006) and Langa's (2010) studies where fatherhood was described as fluid and where uncles were known as 'ubabaomkhulu' [elder father] or 'ubabaomcane' [younger father]. The fathers in this study acknowledged conscious, social personal influence from female figures as opposed to what later emerged to be more 'unconsciously carried' male figures, that not only influenced their constructions of fatherhood but their constructions of absent fatherhood. They reported believing that what makes a man a father was learned from their mothers, grandmothers and romantic partners through witnessing them provide for their children (a role that they still, however, attributed to the domain of fathering). The men in this study felt that they had the utmost respect for these women with regards to the 'fatherhood' lessons imparted to them. This may explain why they did not express much anxiety about their children being raised without them, as unconsciously they may have learned that maternal figures always manage in the care-taker role despite challenges that they may encounter.

These fathers expressed many opinions about fatherhood's connection to culture. While they perceived cultural expectations as playing a role in men becoming absent fathers (which will be discussed further later in this section), they also felt that cultural expectations gave them a chance to be active fathers at some point in their children's lives. Being needed in order for certain cultural rituals to be performed made them feel needed in their children's lives and they felt that regardless of being absent, they still were a vital component in these ceremonies and this gave them a sense of pride. This was related to the power that the participants felt fathers held when they become fathers. Fatherhood was viewed to be a role that possessed omnipotence and authority as participants spoke about their ability to father many children by choice and the control that fathers possess over important decision-making in the household. This echoed Hunter's (2006) findings that in pre-colonial Black communities a successful and respected home was one where the man had fathered many children. This notion seems to have endured and there was a feeling that a fathers' sense of power is something that cannot be challenged.

Similar to the existing literature, the majority of the participants constructed and defined absent fatherhood in categories. Some felt that the uncertainty around the paternity of a child was a really important factor as to why men would become absent fathers. It was expressed that due to their own experiences of their own paternities being questionable, they in turn

questioned their own children's paternity and so the cycle of unconfirmed paternity, absenteeism and rejection was replicated. However, while the existing literature defines absent fatherhood as categorized into physical or emotional absence(Padi et al.,2014), all of the participating fathers constructed it as an absence of both elements on their part. Some participants even went as far as acknowledging the long lasting emotional and psychological effects of this absence on a father. They emphasized the importance of having daily contact and close relationships with their children, where a father would be able to bond with his child and get to know him/her as a person. For them an absent father was a person who did not have first-hand experience of raising their child.

6.3. Influences of fatherhood constructions on the lived experiences of absent fatherhood

This section answers the second and third research questions simultaneously, addressing how these men felt that the above discussed constructions of fatherhood influenced the circumstances in which they became absent fathers. It also addresses how they felt about not playing an active role in raising their children. It was found that the participants' experiences of being absent fathers was closely related to the circumstances that led to their absent father status.

6.3.1. Contextual and cultural factors contributing to absent fatherhood

Amongst these participants African culture and practice was perceived to be one of the main contributing factors to absent fatherhood. Participants expressed that they felt they were financially unable to provide for their children which then made it difficult for them to be able to participate in cultural procedures that would allow them to be active fathers. Morrell's (2006) study found that one of the reasons that fathers do not assume their fatherhood responsibilities is due to having no access to resources, as poverty is one of the most significant factors that undermine the responsibilities of fatherhood and father's abilities to be involved parents. This coincides with what the current participants communicated about feeling incapable to meet what they believe to be their financial responsibilities and thus their fatherhood roles.

They did not feel that their individual financial situations were taken into account and as Black men this was felt to be a major challenge for them, given expectations of them with regards to these cultural requirements. It was found that both in this current study and

previous research, that a man's financial standing has been emphasized in how men construct fatherhood as well as substantiate their absence. Thus, it is important not to discount findings such as those in Lesejane (2006) and Mkhize's (2006) studies, which found that a man without a job will be unlikely to uphold a provider role and thus he will resort to neglecting his father duties. This financial context should strongly be considered when analysing the issue of Black absent fathers in South Africa as it seems to take precedence over physical presence.

There seemed to be an ambivalence and tension in the participants' adherence to cultural practices. In certain instances, culturally-informed traditions were valued for assisting in their involvement. However, there were also cultural practices that were doubted and objected to. Particularly when it came to traditions such as 'lobola' and 'damages', participants had differing and conflicting opinions. Some felt that due to the fact that their financial positions were not taken into consideration, Black fathers were left no choice but to resort to extreme measures in order to be able to partake in cultural activities. One particular participant spoke about having to take out a loan in order to be able to pay what he considered to be an expensive damages sum that was nevertheless rejected as it was not the full amount.

Others considered 'lobola' as a trade for love, which then made it difficult for men to pursue lasting romantic relationships with their partners. This in turn then had an effect on being part of their children's lives. Participants felt that the price for 'lobola' was unreasonable, along with the reasons specified for the particular price families stipulated. They felt that both the price and the basis behind the set price were at times senseless and illogical, as they felt they were being charged for things which they considered to be, in fact, the duties of the woman's family. This correlates to Hunter's (2006) findings that during the pre-colonial time 'lobola' was more centralized around child-price rather than the now common sale of a woman. Examples of the issues raised were things such as the woman's family having to raise and educate their daughter. Participants argued that this was not an act of kindness on their behalf but what they felt a woman's family is supposed to do, thus their lack of understanding as to why they were expected to pay for this. Due to having these views, it seemed that there was a lack of regard and respect for cultural practices that were once negotiated on different terms.

Hunter(2006), Langa(2010) and Ratele (2012) mention that within many African cultures, fathering and fatherhood are associated with the idea of building a home. Previous research found that a great number of men felt powerless and socially inadequate as fathers due to

their inability to pay ‘lobola’, as this was linked to a view that they had failed to build a homestead (Hunter, 2006; Makusha & Richter, 2015). This notion appeared to resonate with the men in this study, as this was one of the factors they identified as the reason they were unable to be active in their family’s and children’s lives. Many of them felt that their socio-historical contexts were not taken into consideration (Langa, 2010; Ratele, 2012).

Differing thoughts were that ‘lobola’ was a necessary ritual as it was the correct way for two African families to come together and be introduced in matrimony. This would coincide with previous research that states that in African culture marriage is viewed to be between the couple and extended family not just the two individuals wishing to marry (Hunter, 2006; Makusha & Richter, 2015). These particular participants felt that the tradition of paying damages was however unnecessary, as they did not see the reason for both ‘lobola’ and damages to paid. There was a general mistrust that once having adhered to these cultural practices that there were no guarantees for this to be a binding agreement. Participants felt that even if money was paid, a woman and her family still could claim divorce or keep them away from their children if they so wished. Most of the participants felt that cultural practices created absenteeism in different ways, such as not allowing for parents who are no longer a couple to co-parent, as well as that the steps to be followed and time frames put in place when one impregnates a woman created distance between them and their children as they were not allowed access to their children until several things were done.

6.3.2. The experience of being an absent father

6.3.2.1. Absent fathers as victims

In general these Black fathers felt a sense of powerlessness, particularly with regards to making decisions or feeling that they had a say in their children’s lives. Participants feeling this way seemed to exacerbate their being absent fathers. This sense of powerlessness, however, also appeared to absolve them of the responsibilities of fatherhood, with many of the participants giving the impression that they were indirectly clearing themselves of having to take responsibility for being absent in their children’s lives.

Many of the participants expressed feelings of emotional and psychological trauma where they reported being constantly preoccupied with their not having a relationship with their children. They expressed feeling that once the mother of their child or other family members

had made a decision that they did not agree with pertaining to their child, they could not change it or go against it.

One participant went as far as feeling that he had no choice but to go along with not ever disclosing to his daughter that he was her biological father as this was what the mother of the child wanted. Another father relinquished his father powers to his own family members which has thus far led him to have no contact with his child despite his deep wish to be a father to her. The participants expressed a deep helplessness with regards to feeling this powerless and seemed not to realize the power they did indeed potentially have. Many of the men had knowledge of the whereabouts of their children and all of them either had direct contact with the mother of their child, maternal family or had a potentially successful way to gain contact, but still chose not to establish contact. They felt that a decision had been made on their behalf to be absent and so it seemed that other avenues of trying to change the situation were either not apparent to them or were experienced as not possible. Participants felt that their children were stolen from them and that they had no role or choice in the matter. Many of them felt that they had exhausted all their options and that they had tried all they could to change the situation.

Contrary to this helplessness was an insinuation by one participant that though there were circumstances that made it difficult for fathers to be in their children's lives, they did indeed have some sort of choice and agency that they were choosing not to exercise. It was an indirect acknowledgement of men's role in being absent fathers. One of the participants took responsibility for his absent fathers status, stating that being an absent father was a choice that men made and even went as far as saying that these men 'did not care'. Another participant somewhat acknowledged that there were other avenues he could try in order to speak to the mother of his child, but quickly returned to the theme of his ex-partner not wanting him in her life. These conflicting views around reasons for absent fatherhood suggested ambivalence within the participants and perhaps some defending against possible feelings of guilt. While many of the participants had indeed suffered rejection and seemed to experience traumatic preoccupation with regards to the loss of their children, the positioning of themselves as victims as opposed to 'abandoners' may also serve a defensive function. It was also significant to note that the victim role seemed not to allow much mental space to consider the effects of the situation on their children.

These oscillating feelings were also present in the researcher's counter-transference, where in the moments where participants spoke about their deep wishes to have a relationship with their children, the researcher experienced strong feelings of empathy and pity. It was during these times that she felt that these men were being taken advantage of and that they did not have any power or options to see their children. On the other hand, during the times where participants spoke about having contact with their children's mothers and some knowing how to locate them, but simultaneously blaming the mothers for their absence, the counter-transference changed to a feeling of impatience and empathy levels decreased. The fathers' presentation of an ambivalent or oscillating stance throughout the interviews where they had a deep wish to be present, but also a fear of the responsibility of fatherhood, was continuously reflected in the researcher's counter-transference towards the men.

In Deslauriers, et al. (2012) study, it was found that fathers, felt that they were victims and discriminated against. They described feeling negatively judged by social institutions such as the legal system and social services organizations designed for families (Deslauriers et al., 2012). They felt that people perceived them as being immature and incapable of assuming their responsibilities as parents (Deslauriers et al., 2012). With regards to this study's participants, they could be perceived as positioning themselves as victims that felt their children were 'stolen' from them. These fathers expressed feelings that suggest that their emotional upset regarding their not having contact with their children was more difficult for them than their children. The participants like the ones in the domestic violence literature felt they were unfairly judged and treated by numerous institutions such as the media and justice systems.

In a domestic violence study that investigated why men were violent towards their partners and children, Featherstone and Peckerover (2007) found that fathers felt that they were primarily constructed as providers of cash and received little attention or recognition either as potential resources for families in a wider sense or in terms of having support needs. This meant that men felt that they were victims of a system that did not support them as parental figures that could offer more than financial contribution. Featherstone and Peckerover (2007) also found that there were considerable levels of tension between partners around household tasks and childcare, thus some men felt resentful if they felt they were doing too much and this was explained as possibly leading to more violence. Some men blamed children for their own abusive behaviour for example such as when they failed to conform to their father's expectations in relation to appropriate behaviour, such as doing homework, going to sleep

and so on (Featherstone & Peckerover , 2007). This suggests that fathers viewed themselves as victims of provocation from their partners and children.

Some fathers in this study recognized their actions as deliberate rather than provoked which displayed a lack of awareness of the need to prioritize the child's own needs or understand the child's own point of view (Featherstone & Peckerover, 2007). An important issue that emerged in relation to contact was that many wanted contact with their as they viewed their children as being able to provide them with 'unconditional love' (Featherstone & Peckerover, 2007). In Durbach and Bain (2016) study, it was stated that Bancroft (1998) and Zosky (2003) suggest that abusive fathers often perceive themselves as being victims, which may be linked to Fonagy's (1999) assertion that some violent men demonstrate a lack of a sense of agency and may therefore feel a sense of reduced responsibility for their own violent actions, perhaps supporting views of the self as a victim. This may have serious consequences for children being raised by such fathers. Similar suggestions were found in Dutton (1995), Dutton (1999) and Fonagy (2008) studies.Though the above studies do not directly address the topic of absent fatherhood, they share similarities in the issue of fathers who perceive themselves as victims in situations where society or others would perceive them as perpetrators.

There seemed to be a shifting of blame and responsibility to the mothers, in that it was suggested and directly stated by some of the participants that the mothers should make things right. One participant felt that his child would one day ask about him and that this would lead to a correction of the situation. There was a tension between the pain, sadness and deep wanting of a connection and relationship with their children and a surrendering of paternal power and responsibility to others. The participants' initial description of a father being a powerful, strong man was tempered by a reality of having to actually fight through many challenges in order to be a part of their children's lives. There seemed to be disconnect between what men are led to believe about fatherhood, the type of fathers they would like to be and society's portrayal of fatherhood.

For the most part, the participants painted a picture that suggested that this just 'happened' to them and it was noteworthy to observe that the mention of their children was when they briefly expressed a wish to have a different relationship with their children and when they implied that their children's conception might have been the basis of the problems they currently face, which lie in obvious tension. Some of the fathers expressed various wishes

with regards to daily contact, emotional, physical, financial presence and to protect their children from the very pain they've experienced by not having had fathers present in their lives. This longing for their children to have paternal roots was also found in Nduna (2014) and Mavungu et al.'s, (2013) studies where fathers described wish such as their children taking up their surnames as it placed the child in the father's and forefather's family and ancestor lineage.

Nduna (2014) and Mavungu et al. (2013) also reported how absent fathers found it to be painful having children that did not take up their surnames as a consequence of their absence and that there was a concern that their children would not know or connect to their roots. However, this wish appeared to be in tension with allusions children not being wanted due to unplanned pregnancies, Which at times felt like 'traps' by the mothers. The fact that many of these fathers did not appear to feel ready for fatherhood may also have contributed their absenteeism. The participants appeared to be simultaneously consciously expressing longings to be fathers and possible unconscious avoidance of the role.

Under this theme of "father readiness" it is worthy to note that all of the participants were quite young when they became fathers and it is important to consider this when trying to think about and understand absent fathers contextually. One needs to consider the mental, psychological, emotional and financial preparedness of a man in his early adulthood to assume the role of fatherhood. Previous studies have described young fathers as vulnerable to becoming absent fathers due to, uncertainty with regards to employment and income, and basic education qualifications (Devault et al., 2008; Lemayet al., 2010). These studies were supported by the findings of this study in that the fathers in this study who expressed feeling unprepared for fatherhood, had indeed become absent fathers. However, they did concur with the finding of the Lemay et al. (2010) study that fatherhood was a powerful motivator to wanting to improve oneself by getting educated, finding employment, and changing how their lives have been lived.

Many of the participants' experiences of becoming fathers involved anxiety, fear and stress, and the idea of fatherhood was something that took time to get used to. The participants' narratives suggested that these anxieties seemed to linger, especially when their financial circumstances had not changed. Many of the participants were still struggling to make ends meet, were psychologically and emotionally still grappling with the idea of fatherhood and felt that they were still not receiving guidance and support to facilitate them being fathers.

This coincides with Devault et al. (2008), Fursteenberg and Weiss(2000) and Rhoden and Robinson(1997)studies that found that, the father's young age at the birth of the first child is a key factor with regards to father involvement, especially in the context of precarious situations. These studies highlighted that young fathers are more likely to have experienced difficult situations in their families of origin and that fatherhood may present numerous challenges with regards to the development of identity, intimacy and generativity (Devault et al., 2008; Fursteenberg & Weiss, 2000; Rhoden & Robinson, 1997).

6.3.2.2. <u>The absent father as role model</u>

Lesajane (2006) and Perry (2009) state that in the Sepedi culture it is believed that a child is part of a broader family where the extended family is considered significant in raising a child and that while a father is facilitated in his transition into fatherhood as a good role model that is available to share his moral authority and uphold family customs and principles. For Black, low income fathers such as these, who feel that they are structurally disadvantaged without financial passing down of wealth and trust funds, there seems to have some failure in the supportive structures in African culture that once existed and that were designed to assist fatherhood through initiation and inheritance of land and farming (Lesejane, 2006).

"Many of the participants reported negative childhood experiences of fatherhood, describing" very rejecting, traumatic and hurtful experiences of their own fathers being absent. All of the men in the study, in one way or another, appear to have internalized an absent father figure in ways that consciously and unconsciously may have modelled physical and emotional unavailabilty as fathers. Trowell and Etchegoyen, (2002) found that fatherhood is more than a biological change that occurs, stating that it encompasses psychological and emotional changes where the child's interests take precedence over one's own. This means that men who have had satisfactory childhood experiences, internalized 'good-enough' emotional, psychological, physical and social care-givers, will develop a good sense of identity that positively influences their transition into fatherhood (Devault, 2008; Hofferth, 2000; Trowell & Etchegoyen, 2002).

Trowell and Etchegoyen (2002) also found that fatherhood involved a process where a man goes through unconscious fantasies of simultaneously wanting the baby and feeling threatened by it which can explain some of the ambivalence expressed above by the participants regarding fatherhood. According to Trowell and Etchegoyen, (2002), when a man becomes a father intrapsychic changes occur where his masculinity is affirmed and he

has identification reactions to his own father, however, he also experiences unconscious feelings of loss of freedom, envy for the mother and feeling displaced. Many of these ideas were also found in the narratives in this study, however, identification seems to have occurred with an internalized absent father, despite their stated wishes to be present fathers.

Some of the participants in the study were aware of the lasting impact of having had an absent father and some still longed to have a relationship with their father, which meant that being an absent father was painful from first-hand experience as well as through repetition in becoming absent fathers. This may also account for some of the ambivalence that was prevalent throughout the participants' narratives.

The repetitions of absent fatherhood were clear in the narratives. For example, like Themba who is still not satisfied with his father blaming his mother for his absence, Themba's child will have the experience of an absent father that has rejected him for reasons unbeknown to him. Thato, who appeared to have internalized a love that has limits due to being abandoned by both parents as well as his adoptive family, has repeated the same pattern, where he has rejected his children and admits to not even thinking of them in any way whatsoever. This theme of repetition helps to combat the stereotype of absent fathers as merely irresponsible, highlighting the importance of rather reflecting on how these men came to be absent fathers. Being an absent father was revealed to be a deeply painful and complex issue for fathers for various reasons. Despite Themba's great wish to be a present father all round, his conflicting views of fatherhood 'being a punishment from God' hint at deep ambivalence about the role of father and complex intrapsychic pathways to absent fatherhood.

6.3.2.3. Contextual constraints

A number of constraints were mentioned, ranging from financial constraints, media representations of absent fathers and cultural expectations of fathers. Participants felt that contextually as Black men they had many additional responsibilities to take care of that made it particularly difficult to provide for their children. A few of them spoke about having to take care of other family members. Hamer, (1998), Manning, Stwewart, and Smick (2003), Seltzer and Bianchi (1988) and Seltzer and Brandreth (1994) found that majority of the legislation policies that deal with father involvement of nonresident children handle the situation as though men have obligations to only one set of children. It was stated that fathers who do not live with their children are often parenting within and outside their current residences, and

that the complications of these multiple responsibilities may cause them to have less economic support as well as visitation with their nonresident children. This is problematic as having to care for multiple children or family members, as above mentioned, factors into what makes it difficult for fathers to be present in their children's lives.

Participants spoke about the effects of being born into a previously disadvantaged racial group and generation, where they feel that they are still facing financial and systemic powerlessness. Black fathers did not feel that they had the same privilege as other fathers from different racial groups, particularly of wealth being passed down inter-generationally. Johnson, Levine and Doolittle's,(1999) study about non-present fathers stated that the main distinction between a White and African American sample was that, the most African Americans had contributed little to the mainstream economy. Furthermore, it was found that Black American's did not have a lot of contact with people who had thrived in the mainstream economy (Johnson et al., 1999). Johnson et al. (1999) further found that in this sample's attempts to find steady work, several of the Black men had to start from scratch. It was found that African American families are able to provide young men food, shelter, piece jobs, money, and nonfinancial support, however seldom able to provide employment that enables them to be self-sufficient or economically stable compared to other racial groups (Johnson et al.,1999).Similar to this current study's findings, Johnson et al. (1999)found that family relatives, friends, and colleagues of participants usually had similarly limited resources and knew as few people in the mainstream as the participants did. Generally, Black American's were found to have less chances to know someone with steady employment, obtain higher education qualification, as well as receive assistance from a relative to source employment(Johnson et al., 1999).

While full exploration of these issues in relation to the participants in this current study was beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that participants felt that if they had been the recipients of the passing down of familial wealth, it would have perhaps made it easier to transition into fatherhood and to be present fathers.

Devault et al. (2008) found that fathers felt that their individual histories had not received enough attention with regards to their involvement in their children's lives. It was expressed that fathers felt that not being the breadwinner and being economically vulnerable directly influenced their involvement in their children's lives (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; Devault

et al., 2008; Lamb, 1997; Townsend ,2000). These studies further found that men not being breadwinners was linked to poor self-esteem and a lowered sense of security thus their lack of involvement and feeling unworthy and unneeded, as they perceived the breadwinner role to belong to a man and not a woman (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; Devault et al., 2008; Lamb 1997; Townsend 2000).

One of the participants also felt that the physical environment a child was raised in contributed to their experience of fatherhood. He felt that Black fathers were disadvantaged as many of them would raise their children in townships which meant that they had unfavourable conditions, such as safety issues and a lack of privacy that made fatherhood more difficult. He felt that other racial groups had the luxury of living in safe, quiet environments, such as in a suburb, that had less distractions, and that fostered a better chance for fathers to be able to spend more quality time with their children. A study conducted by Hofferth (2000) found that differences in residential neighborhood characteristics suggested that parenting would vary by context. This study stated that since Blacks, Whites and Hispanics lived in very different neighborhoods, these contexts may explain race/ethnic differences in fathering (Hofferth, 2000). It was suggested that the extent of control fathers exert over their children's behaviour was indeed function of the overall quality of the neighborhood (Hofferth, 2000).

One particular participant made reference to the influence the media has on Black fatherhood specifically. He felt that programs such as 'Khumbulaekhaya' and 'Utatakho' which are both television shows about Black families in distress with regards to absent fathers, highlighted how problematic the issue of absent fatherhood is specifically for the Black community. He felt that these shows were particularly popular for Black people and Black fathers because this was predominantly a Black man's issue. Sipho additionally expressed how these shows expose the degree of the actual problem, as many Black men are not completely honest about how many children they have fathered. Despite the fact that programs like these may be viewed as perpetuating stereotypes, he felt that, they were useful in highlighting the extent of the problem within the Black community.

The media's depiction of Black men as being infamous for being absent fathers in these particular shows as well as other mediums of media reporting were also found in studies conducted by Bradshaw et al. (1999), Hunter (2006), Khunuou (2006), Manyatshe and Nduna

(2014), and Ratele (2012). The point made by these studies in addition to the above mentioned sentiments was that although Black fatherhood was suffering, contextual factors such as socio-economic challenges in relation to fatherhood were not taken into account and thus damaged how Black absent fathers were being perceived and hindered opportunities for them to be helped.

Another participant expressed that as a Black man he felt that he was not considered as vital with regards to raising his child. He felt that the experience of Black fathers in comparison to other racial groups was that other racial groups viewed a father as a priority in a child's life, whereas this was not the case for a Black father. This perception was thought to worsen the case of Black fathers being absent. This was a sentiment shared across the board, with participants expressing that they often felt that they were not needed, especially when a relationship had ended with the mother of their child. They felt that other racial groups did what was in the best interest of the child, despite factors that may exist that affect the father being able to fulfil his parenting duties to his full potential. A big contributing factor to this was cultural principles that they felt are set up to exclude a father.

Roy (1999) suggested similar sentiments with regards to Welfare policies that gave primacy to child support and providing and disregarded fathers' care-giving. Roy (1999) felt that these policies that prioritize finances over care-giving may limit paternal involvement altogether. Edin, Tach and Mincy (2009) speak about how low-income single fathers are still recognized as avoiding their financial support responsibilities, when in fact they may actually be 'dead broke' and struggling to pay. In spite of making the effort to be good fathers(survey data showing that poor and minority fathers may be involved as caregivers), the assumption lingers that fathers who don't pay maintenance are avoiding their responsibilities.

This neglect of the father's care-giving role is also evident in the literature (Freeman, 2008; Ross, 1979). In the psychoanalytic literature, in particular, fathers have only featured later in the child's development (Freeman, 2008; Ross, 1979).

This disregard for the role of the father can also be seen is within the justice system. The fathers in this study felt that they could not rely on the justice system for assistance in their attempts to gain access to their children. Findings from Khunuou's (2006) study suggests that despite fathers wanting a relationship with their children, courts of law play a role in preventing this from happening, as men may, for example, struggle to comply with

maintenance requirements and thus be prohibited to be active fathers.Lemay et al., (2010), Allen and Doherty (1996), Bunting (2005) and Speake, Cameron and Gilroy (1997) found that young fathers reportedly often view service providers and social institutions not only as unsupportive, but as an actual barrier to parental involvement, with many believing that the staff of hospitals, schools, and social service agencies hinder rather than facilitate their efforts to support their child (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Bunting, 2005; Speake, Cameron, & Gilroy, 1997). This was also found in this study withone father reporting nearly being arrested when approaching the police for assistance. He felt that the affidavit and formal agreement made at the police station was short lived and not followed up when the mother of his child and maternal family did not stick to the agreement.

Another participant felt that the justice system was biased towards the mother of the child regardless of what the full story was. He felt that he was misunderstood and unfairly treated. It was felt that the legal route of trying to gain access to their children was not only expensive but that the procedures took too long. This sentiment related to those found in the Khunuou (2006), Avungu et al. (2013), and Morrell (2006) studies, that stated that the South African legal system not taking into account men's financial struggles may leave them feeling disempowered in their ability to overcome their absenteeism and reinforce the view of father in only a provider role. Other fathers did not even bother to explore the idea of taking the legal route as an option as they felt that there was no point.

The last contextual challenge identified by the participants in this study was that of the mothers of their children acting as gatekeepers. All of the participants in the study stated that for various reasons when their romantic relationships ended with the mother of their children, this was the beginning of the end to any relationship they had or could have had with their children. Some men felt that the mothers were bitter and upset about the break up, thus they were keeping the child away from their father as punishment and a way to settle the score. The participants who still had contact with their child's mother added that if they did anything to displease the mother, contact with them and the child was cut off. The way in which the romantic relationships ended seemed to play a big role in whether or not fathers stood a chance to gain access to their child. The more severed the relationship, the less likely the father would have access to his children. One participant stated that the mother of his child made it clear that all that was required from him was financial provision and not his presence. Though he was willing to make this contribution in the beginning with hopes that

this condition would change, he has thus settled for being completely absent as he does not see the worth in being solely a financial provider when he would like to be more. Some participants have attempted to make contact with their children through telephone calls and have been prevented by mothers from speaking to their children.

Though it can be agreed upon that the father-mother relationship can be helpful with regards to access to the child, this could also be seen as subtle blame-shifting onto mothers by fathers. It is possible that other reasons prevent these men from pursuing their rights to access to their children. Literature produced by Bryan (2013); Dienhart and Daly, 1997 and Easterbrooks et al.(2007) state that the father-mother rapport is specifically significant in order for men to make the changeover into fatherhood, as well as that a close father-mother relationship is a key factor in supporting fathers asit provides the emotional backdrop and informational fuel needed to undertake thoughtful parenting. These findings highlight the importance of mothers as support structures for fathers and imply that fathers who are estranged from mothers may need to look elsewhere for this support in order to father effectively. This positioning of mothers as support for fathers might also put too much pressure on the mother to be responsible for not only taking on her role of motherhood, but for educating and facilitating the father's role of fatherhood. Other sources of support for single fathers may need to be accessed.

It was notable that most of the participants struggled to reflect on potential reasons that might have lead mothers to completely cut them off out of both their children's and their own lives. While they had evidently experienced great loss, of both their partners and their children, at points in the narratives, there seemed to be a dismissive and careless attitude from fathers about the ways in which they may have contributed to the breakdown of relationships with the mothers of their children. This lack of ability to reflect on the mothers' perspectives may contribute to the poor communication between the fathers in this study and the mothers of their children. One particular father could not reflect around the possibility that the mother of his child at the time of her pregnancy was not ready to have a child and that his preventing her to terminate the pregnancy had potentially made her angry. This lack of understanding of the mothers' points of view seemed to contribute to their lack of access to their children. However, while the men who were interviewed were generally dismissive of the reasons their ex-partners were upset, some of them were able to acknowledge some responsibility, be it due to infidelity, not pulling their weight financially or knowing what was culturally expected

of them but not taking the responsibility to get things done. These fathers, however, still seemed to oscillate between acknowledging their role in the conflict and continuing to shift the blame elsewhere.

A similar difficulty taking responsibility for their roles in conflict is found amongst fathers in domestic violence literature where what seems to be a dismissive attitude towards the mothers of their children is found. These men were found to have a significantly decreased ability or patience for considering of the mental states of self and others, in order to understand their own behaviour as well as understand the possible effects of violence upon their children (Fonagy, 2008). This difficulty in reflecting on the consequences of their choices and behaviour was also found amongst the participants in this sample. Though this issue would require further investigation, may help to understand how these men found themselves in situations where their partners have rejected them and attempted to limit contact with their children.

Mothers were not the only gate-keepers that the fathers complained about. One participant made reference to how new partners can act as gatekeepers when fathers want to be involved in their children's lives. It was reported that, beginning a new relationship and still having a relationship with their children was sometimes difficult, as the child sometimes brought complications into the new relationship that resulted in the men becoming absent fathers. Similar sentiments were expressed about step-fathers, where it was stated that culturally when a woman remarries, her new husband should be respected as the person who takes on full responsibility for the child. While some participants complained about being replaced by a step-father, others accepted this belief.

Additionally, very influential gate-keepers for the majority of the participants were the children's maternal family. In the minds of the participants, it seemed impossible to fight against the strong influence of the maternal family on the mother of the child. In some instances where the mother of the child was willing to change her mind or fathers felt that they were about gain access to their children, it seemed that there was an even bigger rival to go up against. Participants felt that the maternal families had very particular conditions they expected the men in their daughters lives to meet and failure to do so meant that they were not only not good enough for their daughters, but also not good enough to be part of their grandchildren's lives either. Participants felt that if they did not meet the financial standards that the family set automatically there were no possible options for them to gain access to

their children or being seen as fit to be fathers. There was a recognition that before they could convince the mother of their child to possibly repair their romantic relationship or gain access to their children, they would need to gain approval from the maternal family.

This concurs with research that found that class difference between a man and the maternal family mattered with regards access to children whether or not the father has a wish to play an active role in their children's lives (Langa, 2010; Mkhize, 2006). Nduna (2014), Smith et al. (2014) also found that the power in African families regarding childcare seemed to be in the maternal family's hands and that a father's economic status determined his worthiness to gain access to his child. An absent father's wish for his child to be connected to his side of the family either by getting to know them or having them take up their surname or perform their cultural rituals seems not to be considered by the maternal families (Nduna, 2014; Smith et al., 2014).

One participant felt more confident that now that the maternal family seemed to be in support of him, he was more likely to be able to foster a relationship with his child. All the participants felt that the maternal family was potent as they believed that the mothers tended to listen to their families regardless of how they themselves may personally be feeling. The maternal family was seen to hold the deciding power. The participants who felt they had tried to get into both the child's mother and maternal family's good graces and failed, had resorted to extreme measures of trying to have contact with their children, such as surprise visits in the street when no one was around or even taking the child without permission while playing in the street, which they got into trouble with the law for doing. This highlights the desperation of absent fathers who feel powerless and out of viable options.

7.1. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to gain the perspectives of Black absent fathers as to their understandings of absent fatherhood and the factors they understand to have contributed to them becoming absent fathers. It was concerned with 'their side of the story'. They offered heart-warming and desperate narratives that may allow the reader a glimpse into their struggles. The narratives elicit empathy for their situations at times, rather than the more common response of judgement. Although this study only had five participants, many of the findings confirmed and extended the findings of previous studies in this area.

Given South Africa's long painful traumatic history, it is important to not to downplay the seriousness of the effect it has had on Black absent fatherhood. The psychological damage caused and repeated by absent fatherhood suggests that further research in this area is required. These Black men have expressed that they are feeling powerless in significant areas in their lives and that this prevents them from being active in their children's lives. It might be useful to investigate links between their feelings of powerlessness and their not having had present father figures in their lives. Instead of shaming and judging them, it is worthwhile to listen. It may be that certain Black men are in need of assistance in order to make a smoother transition into fatherhood where their contextual circumstances are better handled in order to achieve this.

One could consider all that has been expressed from these fathers as excuses for being absent fathers and offer counter arguments. However, given that these are not new issues, having been found in a number of research studies, the construction of fatherhood as financial provider in a context where many Black men are financially disempowered prevents many from being able to assume their positions as active fathers. Laws that still prioritise maternal care add to this disempowerment. It is worth really investigating these further and genuinely taking them into consideration when trying to understand and reduce the number of cases of Black absent fathers in South Africa. Especially since more households in the country are becoming single-headed female run homes (Mavungu et al., 2003; Ratele , 2012). Many Black South African men have found themselves in positions that are challenging both contextually and psychologically. These need creative rectifying initiatives.

7.2. Strengths and limitations:

A strength of this study was the closeness and interactive relationship between the researcher the participants, as it allowed for a first-hand experience and authenticity that provided valuable and meaningful data the more time they spent together (Carr, 1994). The researcher's personal investment in the topic and her constant vigilance regarding her own counter-transferential responses added to her understanding of these absent fathers' experiences (Carr, 1994). The individual interview format allowed participants, as well as the

researcher, to feel more comfortable and less intimidated or afraid to express views that otherwise may have been more intimidating in a group setting.

However, the study also had a number of limitations. The difficulty with finding participants meant that saturation was not reached and so due to the sample being small, generalization of the findings to a greater population is not possible. However, this study aimed to examine the experiences and understandings of this small sample and did not seek to be generalizable. Rather the aim was to document a particular set of participants' subjectivities or experiences as documented by a particular researcher with their own particular set of subjectivities (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; Flick, 1998). Linked to this, is the issue of credibility, as qualitative, psychosocial research is viewed as not being able to present ideas that can be evidenced by data thus additional steps are taken such as the researcher using their supervisor as an additional mind to review themes and judge if they reflect the narratives presented (Elliot et al., 1999; Flick, 1998).A strength of qualitative psychosocial approach is that it was able to capture more nuanced aspects of the research material (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Parker (2015) speaks about the potential of research running the risk of 'oversubjectification' but that the combination of a psychoanalytic approach and psychosocial approach minimizes this.

7.3. Recommendations for further research

Without seeming to make excuses for why men become absent fathers, it is important to take note of the fact that all of the fathers in the study were rejected and abandoned by their fathers for reasons unbeknown to them. Psychologically, it seems important to consider the damaging effects of this type of rejection in relation to how it affects and deeply influences men becoming absent fathers themselves. The idea of repetitions versus reparation needs to be investigated especially in cases where men have grown up without fathers themselves, so that how men internalize fatherhood can be shifted. It would be interesting to investigate the process whereby some men with absent fathers are able to be present for their children, breaking cycles of repetition.

Lemay et al. (2010) suggest that further research should be focused on the beliefs and attitudes of young fathers with regards to fatherhood as this is not an area widely studied at the moment. This could be helpful in understanding and preventing absent fatherhood as this research found that one of the possible contributors to absenteeism was the age at which the

men became fathers. It would be suggested that studies regarding Black absent fatherhood be conducted on larger sample sizes in order to confirm and expand on studies such as the current one (Lemay et al., 2010). This could be achieved by partnering up with organizations and outreach programs as a way to gain access to larger numbers of absent fathers, as they seem to be a particular difficult sample to access (Lemay et al., 2010).

Deslauriers et al. (2012) would suggest that further research also focus on initiatives that can reach unmarried and non-residential fathers before the birth of their children in order to assist them becoming involved in active parental role that are sustainable over time. Due to the fact that absent fathers problems are multidimensional, research should focus on factors such as:

- Pregnancy crisis
- Abortion consultation
- Parenting workshops, including a look at the father's role
- Legal advice
- Relationship sessions
- Recreational activities
- Information on choosing a career
- Employment training and placement
- Their attitudes towards masculinity
- Their view of fatherhood
- The strengths and weaknesses of their own fathers
- Their goals as fathers
- Parenting skills
- The principles of child development
- The importance of being present at the birth
- Training in how to support the mother, for example through active listening
- Responsible sexual behaviour
- Avoiding another unplanned pregnancy

This is a complex issue that cannot only be addressed by tackling singular issues and thus time and energy needs to be invested (Deslauriers et al., 2012).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear potential participant _____

I am a Masters student in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. My Masters research is focused on the constructions of absentee fatherhood amongst black South African men. I am aware that this may be a sensitive topic to discuss but will endeavour to make you feel as comfortable as possible. I am interested in your experiences and your understandings of the decisions you have made.

Should you agree to participate in this research, you will be interviewed by me for approximately 60 minutes. There may be a possibility of an additional interview should we both decide that this will be useful or necessary. Should you and I decide that a second interview might be necessary, this would ideally be scheduled within two week's time after the first interview. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed time and place where privacy and confidentiality can be assured. At all times, your right to confidentiality will be respected.

During the interview you will be asked a number of questions about issues pertaining to fatherhood which will involve your personal experiences on this topic. You are able to refuse to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering and may choose not to continue participating in the study at any time. There will also be no repercussions should you decide to withdraw from this research.

Confidentiality will be maintained by ensuring that no personal identifying information is disclosed in the research by the use of pseudonyms (made up names). With your permission, each interview will be audio recorded so that it can be transcribed (typed up). All recordings will be saved in a password secure folder and only I will have access to the recordings. At the end of the research, the audio recordings will be destroyed and with your permission the anonymised transcripts will be archived for possible future research purposes.

When transcribing, the researcher will also remove any personally identifying material that may have been mentioned inadvertently from the transcripts. If approved, this research may be published in academic journals and excerpts of transcripts (direct quotes) may be included in the published material. Should you wish, a summary of the research findings can be emailed to you.There will be no monetary compensation for your participation in this research. Should you wish, a summary of the research findings can be emailed to you.There will be no monetary compensation for your participation in this research.Given the sensitivity of this topic, if anything that has been discussed evokes any unsettling feelings for you, Dr. Esther Price can be directly contacted on Esther.Price@wits.ac.za or 011 717 4517. Dr.

Esther Price is the supervisor at the Emthonjeni Community Psychology Clinic which is a free service for free counselling. Please notify her that you have been referred as a participant in HopolangMatee's Masters research for counselling.

Your participation in this research is voluntary.Should you have any further queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HopolangMateeDr. Katherine Bain
Clinical Psychology student Supervisor
Tel: 073 044 2123 Tell: 011 717 4558
Email: hopolang44@gmail.comKatherine.Bain@wits.ac.za

Human Research Ethics Committee
Tell: 011 717 1408
Email: Lucille.Mooragan@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM:

I_____ agree to take part in HopolangMatee's research studyon the constructions of absenteefatherhood amongst black South African men.

I give my consent with the understanding that:

1. I have read and understood the information provided in the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have.
2. At all times during the research, myconfidentiality will be ensured and my personal details and name will not be disclosed to anyone except the researcher. I will remain anonymous in any research reports or articles.
3. My participation in this research is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the research before the writing up of the study has begun.
4. I am not obligated to answer any question I do not feel comfortable answering.
5. I also understand that I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will not be disclosed. Afterthe report is finished a copy will be kept in the library at the University of theWitwatersrand and will be available to people who have access to the library.Ifa journal article is published, my identity will be protected.
6. Audio-recordings will be destroyed after completion of the study and the anonymized transcripts will be archived for possible future research purposes if I agree to this. Thereare no direct benefits for me in participating in this study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

I agree to having the anonymous transcript of my interview archived for further research purposes. Please tick Yes_____ or No_____

I, _____, agree to have the interviews conducted by HopolangMatee as part of her research on constructions of fatherhood amongst black South African men audio recorded.

I give my consent with the understanding that:

1. My identity will not be disclosed to any third parties and that the researcher will be the only person to be aware of my participation in this research.
2. The recordings will be stored in a password secured folder and the researcher will be the only person who has access to the audio recordings.
3. After the research is completed all audio recordings will be destroyed.

I agree to having the interview audio recorded

Please tick Yes_____ or No_____

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX 3

Looking for research participants

Are you a black South African father who has not had any contact or very little contact with your child since he/she was born?

If so, please consider participating in my MA Clinical Psychology research study on Black South African fathers' experiences on absentee fatherhood.

If you are interested in participating in my study please take my email address details from the envelope below and contact me.

Kind Regards

HopolangMatee

APPENDIX 4

SOCIAL MEDIA PARTICIPATION REQUEST

My name is HopolangMatee and I am currently conducting research towards my MA degree in the Department of Psychology at Wits University.

The aim of my research is to explore experiences of absentee fatherhood amongst black South African men who have no contact with their children at all or since the child was 12 years of age. The study wishes to explore the meanings that men who are absent fathers make of their not having had contact with their children, and their understandings of fatherhood in relation to this.

This is a sensitive topic, and I am aware of the societal judgments and criticism that surround this issue. I am interested to hear your experience and your understanding of this. I would like to invite you to participate in the study, which will entail an approximately 60minute interview with me. All the contents of the interview will be strictly confidential and no personally identifying information will be used in my research report.

Eligibility criteria for your participation are:

- You are a black South African male aged between 25-50years old
- You have a child that is known to you, but have no contact (or very little contact) with him/her at all.

Please email mehopolang44@gmail.com if you or anyone you know is willing to participate in the study and I will contact you to arrange a convenient time to conduct the interview.

Regards

HopolangMatee

APPENDIX 5

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How would you define the word father, i. e. what is a father?
2. What are your thoughts regarding fatherhood?
3. Where do you think you got these ideas about fatherhood from?
4. What was your relationship like with your father when you were growing up?
5. How is that relationship in the present day?
6. How old were you when you became a father?
7. Please would you tell me a bit about what that experience was like for you?
8. What does it mean for you to be a black father in South Africa today?
9. Do you think the fact that you are black makes fathering different for you, than for someone of another race?
10. What is difficult or challenging about being a black father in South Africa today?
11. What would you say is/are the reason/s for not having contact with your child/children?
12. What do you understand by the term absent father?
13. What is like for you when you think about yourself as being an 'absent' father?
14. What are your thoughts about why some black South African fathers avoid fathering?
15. When last did you have contact with your child/children's mother?
16. How do you feel about not having contact with your child/children?
17. Do you ever wish your relationships with your child/children was different? If so, how?
18. Have you ever thought of making an attempt to have contact with your child/children?
    If yes-What lead you to still remain without having contact?
    If no-Why not?
19. Whatis the relationship between you and the mother of your child/children like now?
20. How was the relationship before separating and the child was born?
21. What are your opinions on African practices such as lobola, damages etcetera, with regards to fatherhood?
22. Is there anything else you think might be important for me to know about this topic?