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The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing up without their Biological Fathers

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The University of the Witwatersrand

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PSYC7036A

Clinical Psychology Research Proposal

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Research Title:

The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing up without their Biological Fathers

Title

The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing Up Without Their Biological Father

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Declaration

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of a Masters in Clinical Psychology, in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 15 March 2024.

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

Signed 

Dated 15 March 2024

Ethics Clearance Number: MClin/23/05

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Introduction

Father absenteeism in South Africa has become a common experience for children across the nation (Mndende, 2021; Freeks, 2017). While there has been extensive research done on how this phenomenon affects families financially, socially, and economically, there is a gap in research around how father absenteeism affects black children and specifically South African black males who attend university (Salami & Okeke, 2018; Ratele et al., 2012). Moreover, there is a need to explore how relevant the academic literature on and around father absenteeism is to the experience of young black males in a South African context. With only 31,7% of black children who are growing up with their biological fathers present, there is a need to explore the experience of young black children who experience father absenteeism and how they make sense of fatherhood and their own identity concerning their absent fathers (Mndende, 2021; Ratele et al., 2012). This study aims to focus in particular on the experiences of young black males who, it is suggested, hold the potential to either dilute a sociohistorical generational curse that has plagued black communities for generations or to continue an infamous tradition of absent fathers in the lives of black children across South Africa. Thus, this study aims to explore the experiences of young black male university students growing up without their biological fathers within the South African context. This research paper also aims to consider how young black male university students growing up without their fathers understand and make sense of their own gendered identity and masculinity. Furthermore, this paper seeks to interrogate how these young black men who attend university make sense of the role and act of fatherhood. Due to the aims of the research paper placing importance on the exploration of the unique experiences of father absenteeism of young black males, this research study proposes a qualitative research design which will be rooted within the interpretivist paradigm (Jackson II et al., 2007; Symon & Cassell, 2012). Data was collected through a focus group of 5 participants and semi-structured individual interviews with 6 separate participants that were sampled through non-probability convenience sampling at The University of the Witwatersrand. With the use of thematic analysis and reflexive accounts of how one's position as a young black male influenced the direction of the study, an intricate and detailed data analysis was conducted.

Aims of the Study

The research paper aims to explore the experience of young black male university students growing up without their biological fathers, within the South African context. In particular, the paper aims to consider how young male university students growing up without their fathers understand and conceptualise their own gendered identity and masculinity. A further aim of the paper is to interrogate how these young black men make sense of fatherhood. This will be done through the use of a qualitative research design and the use of a social constructivism theoretical framework.

Rationale of The Study

Father absenteeism in a post-colonial Southern African context has become an all-too-familiar reality for children across the country (Ratele et al., as cited in Salami & Okeke, 2018). Statistical evidence backs this reality as studies show that 76% of South African children are living in single-mother households (Mndende, 2021; Matangira, 2021). Moreover, it is a social epidemic which has detrimentally affected the lives of black South Africans, as only 31,7% of black children are growing up with their biological fathers today (Mndende, 2021; Stats SA, 2021). Compared to other racial groups, where 51% of coloured[1]children, 80.2% of white children, and 86% of Asian/Indian children grow up with their biological fathers, the incidence of father absenteeism in black communities is significant and is associated with ongoing harrowing social, economic, developmental, and psychological effects on the lives of millions of black South Africans (Mndende, 2021; Mavungu, 2013). Albeit, the commonality of absent fathers in South Africa has become a normalised reality, and is therefore a discourse which is not fully interrogated and

[1] In a South African context, the term coloured refers to a racial group which has origins dating back to the colonisation of South Africa in the 1600s (Pirtle, 2022). Racial mixing of white Europeans, indigenous Khoi and San groups, and black racial groups fostered the coloured racial category and differed from black, white and Indian racial groups in South Africa (Pirtle, 2022). Thus, the use of the term 'coloured' in this research report does not refer to a derogatory term usually used to describe the black community in countries such as The United States and Canada.

interacted with on a developmental and emotional level. As a consequence, the socioeconomic effects of father absenteeism have not been given significant and necessary academic attention (McDougal III et al., 2018, Ratele et al., 2012). The destructive legacy of the apartheid regime and the implementation of migrant labour laws, coupled with the conflicting gendered roles within the black family model, create a picture of the effects that father absenteeism has on the development of the young black population (Makusha & Richter, 2014)Focusing this study on young black male university students and their understandings of fatherhood, masculinity, and gendered identities allows for the social issue of fatherlessness to be understood through the experience of those directly affected by the social phenomenon while looking at a specific population that has been understudied (Ratele et al., 2012; Morrell & Richter, 2004). Moreover, this study allows for the social issue of fatherlessness and its overlap with gendered identities to be understood through a current and contemporary lens, rather than relying on somewhat outdated and controversial academic constructions that may not resonate with the ever-evolving social community of South Africa.

Literature Review

Introductory Paragraph

This section seeks to gain insight into the literature on the complexities of the role of a father and fatherhood within a South African context. A social constructivist theoretical framework will provide the lens through which to interrogate the multi-layered relationship between apartheid and the black family model within a democratic South Africa. Furthermore, a definition of fatherhood and gendered identity will be conceptualised, with both concepts being related through an exploration of fatherhood and how it affects masculinity. This will be followed by a review of the detrimental effects father absenteeism has on young black males and the generational loop that this phenomenon propagates.

Theoretical Framework

This research paper will make use of and should be understood through a social constructivist theoretical framework. Social constructivism is understood as an epistemological framework in which the inherent physical and metaphysical human experience is formulated and constantly evolved through interaction with other beings and our social environment (VandenBos, 2015, Eberle, 2004). This framework emphasises the notion that our knowledge is reciprocally influenced by and influences our social contexts and human behaviours (VandenBos, 2015; Taylor et al., 2016). Social constructivism places importance on how sociohistorical and cultural discourses and experiences are pertinent to how a person experiences reality, as well as to how reality is formulated (VandenBos, 2015; Eberle, 2004). Subsequently, social constructivism suggests that knowledge is formulated, reconstructed, and maintained through a socially communal process of linguistic expression between human interactions (VandenBos, 2015; Buzzanell, 2017). It can be said that the critical analysis of this development of epistemologies that social constructivism emphasises is imperative when looking at this research study on fatherhood through the eyes of young black men who have a subjective experience of father absenteeism. Through the use of language and facilitated dialogue within a focus group and individual semi-structured interviews, fatherhood, masculinity, and one's identity, all of which are parts of socially developed human features and identities, will be understood and interrogated. These parts of socially developed gendered and sociohistorical identities hold centuries of socially constructed heteronormative and patriarchal power dynamics which are placed on someone even before birth (Moynihan, 1998). Thus, a study such as this requires a framework such as social constructivism to ensure that social context is constantly kept in mind when understanding fatherhood, gendered identity, and the relational conceptualisations formulated by young black males.

The Heteronormative Perspective of This Research on Fatherhood Within Families

It is important to note that this research paper will take a look at fatherhood within a heteronormative family model. This is to say that a specific scope on what are the effects which may arise when a black biological father who is male leaves the family unit which consists of a black mother who is female and their child or children. Moreover, a specific focus is to look at how the absence of a black biological father may affect a young black male's understanding of

their gendered identity and where they view themselves in the world with their understanding of their masculinity. This is not to assume that there is only one understanding of or a correct way in which a family system may function. Moreover, this study does not wish to imply that father absenteeism has a stark influence on sexuality. Extensive research has been done on how LGBTIA families and the dynamics within these family systems as Queer Theorists have sought to evolve discourses around the intricate layers of families with LGBTQIA parental figures (Garwood & Lewis, 2019; Goldberg & Allen, 2013; Goldberg, 2023; Goldberg, 2013; Haines et al., 2018; Tasker et al., 2018; Gabb & Allen, 2020). The specific focus of this research paper on heteronormative family systems is primarily a decision guided by an assumption of the predicted sample demographic as it is expected that a large majority of the potential participants will come from heteronormative families. Thus, this does not mean that this research holds a heteronormative stance, but rather, it intends to draw on the available sample.

The Intricate Concept of Fathers and Fatherhood in Black South Africa

Fatherhood and the social act of being a father within a post-colonial South Africa are influenced by both traditional views of paternal care as well as Western ideals on the nuclear family structure (Mncanca et al., 2016; Morrell & Richter, 2014). In a Southern African Context, fatherhood has been seen as a role centred around being able to provide for one's family, a group effort which is shared between men in a child's life, as well as a role which is not centred around sentimental care which has socially been constructed as a feature of maternity (Mncanca et al., 2016; Mavungu, 2013). This role of a father is seen as one which holds social weight as they have historically been viewed as the heads of the households where decisions and responsibilities are handled by them (Makofane cited in Gladys, 2020; Richter et al., 2010). The ability to provide resources and financial support to their families is seen as one of the essential markers of an upstanding and masculine father, as fatherhood and a male's ability to provide are closely linked (Mavungu, 2013; Mncanca et al., 2016). The role of fatherhood has also consisted of being a representation of a family. Moreover, the ability to protect their family from social challenges and dangers as well as providing love and moral guidance encompasses a father's perceived success or failure (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Maurer & Pleck, 2006).

Men who are close to one's family may also share this responsibility of fatherhood, and its social responsibility may be upheld by the grandfathers, uncles, brothers, or friendly male figures within a child's social community who, in many Southern African contexts, are morally obligated to provide some sort of paternal care when required (Mncanca et al., 2016; Richter et al., 2010). This differs greatly from Western fatherhood frameworks as the role of a father is largely centred around the biological relationships between a man and his child (Mncanca et al., 2016; Morrell & Richter, 2006). Fatherhood in Southern African contexts is a social phenomenon closely linked to the Afrocentric concept of ubuntu which is a philosophical framework which places importance on collective social responsibilities that a community shares and with which it works in alignment (Mkhize, 2006; Koketso et al., 2019). Fatherhood is seen as a social responsibility rather than a sole responsibility of one individual (Koketso et al., 2019). This, coupled with traditional and rigid patriarchal viewpoints of fathers as being the heads of their respective families, presents an intricate mix of various men being warranted the societal respect of being a father (Mkhize, 2006; Morrell, 2006; Richter et al., 2010). Albeit, western and more individualistic value systems and traditional African and communal understandings of parental roles were blended through the implementation of the intrinsically Western apartheid ideologies and laws which South African communities were forced to adopt (Richter & Morrell, 2006; Makusha & Richter, 2014).

Apartheid, A Post-Colonial South Africa and The Model of Black Families

The destructive sociohistorical context of South Africa and the idiosyncrasies of an array of social beliefs in the country has led to challenges in conceptualising fatherhood and father participation (Mncanca et al., 2016; Makusha & Richter, 2014). The complex apartheid regime had many detrimental layers that ensured that black communities were divided, dominated, and ultimately destroyed from the outside in (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Makusha & Richter, 2014). The apartheid system used oppressive laws to segregate and control non-white racial groups to ensure that the white population gained and maintained economic socio-political power (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Malherbe & Kaminer, 2020). One oppressive law was the implementation of the migrant labour law which forced the majority of black and non-white men to resettle far from their families to provide for said families and subsequently place the responsibility to foster their children's pivotal development on the women (Richter & Morrell, 2006; Makusha & Richter,

2014; Chauke & Khunou, 2014). Furthermore, the implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 further dismantled black households and the role of fatherhood as discriminatory rulings through taxation, land confiscation, and the relocation of black communities dissolved the paternal ability to provide (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Malherbe & Kaminer, 2020). Economic disempowerment forced black fathers to work away from their families in disenfranchised homelands where they would only return on special occasions such as Christmas holidays or when their work tenure had been completed (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Malherbe & Kaminer, 2020). It can be said that the socially constructed markers of being a provider within the black South African context played an important role in pushing black fathers to seek work even under the dire circumstances of apartheid.

This generational trauma seeped into post-1994 South Africa as black communities have not been able to heal from the past wounds of the apartheid regime while being unable to adapt to the constantly evolving social structures that hold South Africa together. Subsequently, fatherhood in South Africa is an ever-changing concept that has further evolved and changed through the integration of Western beliefs around nuclear families (Mncanca et al., 2016). This, coupled with the positive and progressive inclusion of more women in the economy during the 20th century, has placed more importance on equal participation in early childhood development (Mncanca et al., 2016, Mncanca & Okeke, 2016). Furthermore, research around the importance of the father's involvement in a child's life has continued to develop the concept of paternity as one that not only includes resourcefulness but also emotional care and support (East et al. 2006; Robinson, 2021; Blundell, 2005). Subsequently, there is a need to define or, rather, redefine gender roles and fatherhood within a Southern African context.

Defining Fatherhood within the South African Context

It is said that there are four types of father participation in South Africa; namely economic fathers, teenage fathers, social fathers, and absent fathers (Mncanca et al., 2016; Morel as cited in Mncanca et al., 2016). Economic fathers refer to men who play a role in the everyday maintenance of a child's various means which include food, clothes, education and shelter (Mncanca et al., 2016). With Southern African communities measuring the success of a father on a man's ability

to provide for their family, it is no wonder that economic fathers are so prevalent within the country. This prioritisation of economic resourcefulness has social implications as men who can provide and support their families are given a sense of respect and a position within their communities (Mncanca et al., 2016). Subsequently, there is a close link between economic fathers and absent fathers as those who cannot provide due to unemployment and other hardships may remove themselves from the early childhood development of their children (Fagan as cited in Mncanca et al., 2016; Ratele et al., 2012). Teenage fathers refer to male teenagers who have children through teenage pregnancy, another highly prevalent societal issue in South Africa (Mncanca et al., 2016). A social father refers to men who may not be a child's biological father but who still provides care and attention to the child (Mncanca et al., 2016; Ratele et al., 2012). This can be seen as a by-product of the high levels of absent fathers, as the statistics previously presented coupled with cultural understandings of communal parental care make social fathers the most common types of fathers in South Africa (Smith et al., 2014; McDougal III et al., 2018).

Absent fathers can be defined as men who do not actively participate in the lives of their biological children socially, emotionally, economically, or custodially (Mndende, 2021; Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). Through this definition, a father can be physically absent in that they do not live with their children for long periods and can be present physically but non-present emotionally, socially, and financially (Mndende, 2021; Ratele et al., 2012). With apartheid's detrimental legacy acting as a base structure upon which modern black families have been built, various other reasons for high levels of father absenteeism have manifested (Mncanca et al., 2016; Mavungu, 2013). On the surface level, biological father absenteeism passes down the generational trauma of poverty and unemployment that ultimately fosters future absent fathers due to the constant inability to provide for one's child (Mathews et al., 2011; Freeks, 2017). The link between poverty and migrant labour has transcended South Africa's progression into democracy, as the tradition dating back to the 1800s of black men travelling and living far from their families has been sustained due to the state of the economy (Crush as cited in Mncanca et al., 2016; Rabe as cited in Mncanca et al., 2016). This societal phenomenon is still justified by said fathers as providing financial means and resources is prioritised over more personal paternal care (Rabe as cited in Mncanca et al., 2016; Malherbe &. Kaminer, 2020). Furthermore, divorce or separation from a child's mother, absence through death, constant travelling for occupational purposes, living

away from their children for long periods, incarceration, and the inability to resourcefully provide for their families are just some of the reasons used to justify father absenteeism by absent fathers and the social community (Sikweyiya et al., 2016; Makusha & Richter, 2014; Clowes et al as cited in Padi et al., 2014).

This research paper will acknowledge and look at young black males who have experienced father absenteeism for the reasons described above, except for incarceration as this is seen as a temporary absence where the child may still regularly visit their father or the father may be released from prison (Clowes et al. as cited in Padi et al., 2014).

The Importance of Father Participation in Early Childhood Development

While there has been extensive research done on the economic and social effects of how father absenteeism affects future generations, it is important to highlight research done on understanding the emotional and psychological effects of growing up without a biological father (Hines, 2013; Salami & Okeke, 2018). The increase in research done on the importance of father participation in the upbringing of a child and the progression of gender roles has redefined the role of fathers in shaping a child's life (Mncanca et al., 2016). A father's engagement in taking care of their child through interactions which include feeding, dressing, and play is equally important as being a provider in a child's development (Jain et al. as cited in Dickerson, 2011; Leath, 2017). Studies have shown that fathers' participation in play and overall involvement may hold importance in developing a child's social behaviour, academic or educational performance, and linguistic and cognitive capabilities (Mezulis et al. as cited in Dickerson, 2011; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Dickerson, 2011). Moreover, fathers may influence how their children deal with interpersonal conflicts (Dickerson, 2011). Interactions between a child's father and mother, as well as their interactions with their father, help conceptualise conflict resolution techniques which are when a child enters adolescence and young adulthood (Dickerson, 2011; Goeke-Morey & Cummings as cited in Dickerson, 2011). Part of conflict resolution and self-discovery through social interaction is a child's emotional security and confidence, factors which are promoted through a close father-child relationship (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Day & Padilla-Walker as cited in Dickerson, 2011). Furthermore, a close relationship with one's father during the stage of

young adulthood has been linked with a progressive development of one's self-esteem, individuality, and gender identity (Perrin et al. as cited in Dickerson, 2011; Leath, 2017).

Gender Identity and Its Position in Our Patriarchal Society

Gender identity has been socio-historically viewed as a socially constructed selfhood where an individual views themselves within a socially constructed masculine-feminine binary system (Burkhalter, 2018). This gendered self-image is said to be influenced by an individual's sociohistorical context as the understandings of what is masculine and feminine are conceptualised through the experiences and social constructions through which an individual lives (Fast as cited in Burkhalter, 2018). Through personal experiences and one's understanding of their gendered role, gender identity is put together, manifested and outwardly expressed (Young-Bruehl as cited in Burkhalter, 2018). Masculinity and femininity today are no longer viewed as linear and strictly binary entities due to the fluidity and multifaceted nature of identity (Burkhalter, 2018). Thus, Gender identity needs to be understood as a shifting phenomenon which is experienced throughout a lifetime within a unique individual living under existing heteronormative understandings of and around masculine-feminine expressions (Burkhalter, 2018). The shifting narratives around identity, and specifically gender identity, are discussed and interrogated in various sectors of society. Amongst these different sectors is media where media platforms play an important role in how societal norms are interrogated, affirmed and practiced (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013; Kivel & Johnson, 2009).

Moreover, media platforms provide a space where varying social constructs such as gender and identity can be discussed, as well as the power relations that come with different socially constructed labels (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013; Nesbit-Larking, 2022). It is through discourse that these constructs are maintained as patriarchal understandings of masculinity place power in this said phenomenon and the preconceived and sociohistorical notion that masculinity is opposed by the more inferior femininity (Spivak as cited Burkhalter, 2018). Thus, the performative nature of our identities is ruled by patriarchal conceptualisations and symbolism, as masculinity is viewed from a point of power and idealism, while femininity is critically understood in a subordinate nature to masculinity (Burkhalter, 2018). Subsequently, one cannot ignore how the process by

which men have held socio-political power and dominance over women through the implementation of hegemonic masculinity in society (Connell as cited in Hagedorn, 2019). Furthermore, one cannot ignore how this patriarchal system which society upholds is the same system by which humans and, for the sake of this research paper, young black men are dictated by. This ultimately necessitates the importance of shedding light on how young black males growing up without a biological father experience their gendered reality in such a patriarchal world.

The Fatherhood-Masculinity Model

With hegemonic masculinity and a patriarchal society which implicitly guides societal cues and social behaviours in mind, one can look at Pleck's (2010) conceptualisation of the Fatherhood-Masculinity Model as a way to help understand the relationship between fatherhood, masculinity, and their connection to the mutually beneficial relationship between a father and their child. This model highlights the intersectionality between fatherhood and masculinity which may occur as a by-product of the interactions between a father and his child (Marsiglio & Pleck as cited in Pleck, 2010). Fatherhood's multi-layered nature is noted by Pleck (2010); fatherhood in this model is understood as a parental status where a father takes up the role of paternal caregiver, as well as an act of parenting through the explicit provision of emotional and economic support, guidance, social interactions and overall paternal attention (Pleck, 2007; Pleck, 2010). Masculinity in terms of the Fatherhood-Masculinity Model is viewed in a paradoxical binary scope; masculinity is seen as a male gender status which is understood through the heteronormative lens of a person being male and not female, and contrastingly masculinity is seen as a fluid orientation which looks at the malleability and multifaced nature of the male gender status construct (Pleck, 2010; Masciadrelli et al., 2006). While this model and the research paper look at fathers who fall under the heteronormative gender status of being male, this concept of masculinity orientation encompasses the various layers and possibilities of masculinity in both fathers and their children.

Subsequently, positive father involvement in a child's life has mutually beneficial outcomes for both the father and the child (Pleck, 2010). It is said that satisfaction in the relationships and the overall lives of a father, as well as positive mental health and socio-economic

status are seen as the possible outcomes an involved father may attain (Pleck, 2010). This positive participation in the lives of their children may also bring a sense of identity within a father's life as providing and being a positive paternal figure is a key part of masculinity orientation and what makes a man a father within a South African context (Mncanca et al., 2016; Mavungu, 2013). Amongst the previously mentioned possible positive outcomes of father participation for the children, fathers' construct maleness and masculine characteristics through their actions, value systems, and guidance which ultimately influences a child's understanding of themselves about their fathers (Pleck, 2010). Furthermore, positive father involvement is said to provide a positive male role model in the lives of young boys who are faced with the difficult development of their masculinities (Richter & Morrell as cited in Ratele, 2010). This is relevant when looking at young black males growing up without their biological fathers as the correlations between father participation and self-identity should be kept in mind throughout the research study.

Concluding Remarks

Over the past several decades, there has been a social and academic investment in understanding fatherhood. Specifically, there has been a focus on the socioeconomic and psychological effects of father participation within various social classes, on fathering differentials, on the ever-evolving societal norms of parental participation, as well as on the impact which father absenteeism has on the identity of children (Bryan, 2013; Pleck, 2010; Langa, 2010; Langa, 2014; Makusha & Richter, 2014; Morrell & Richter, 2004). Moreover, academic light has been shed on the African-American experience of father absenteeism and its intergenerational effects on African-American males' perception of fatherhood, as well as a more local scope on father absenteeism by South African social academics (Cross, 2021; Clowes, 2006; Padi et al., 2014; Nduna et al., 2016; Hamer, 1998; Ratele et al., 2012; Freeks, 2017; Richter & Morrell, 2006; Langa, 2016). While the literature on father absenteeism has been increasing, there is a need to explore how young black men who have grown up without their biological fathers make sense of fatherhood, masculinity, and their gendered positionality in society. Moreover, there is also a need to understand how the academic rise in absent father epistemologies relates to the experience of young black males in South Africa. This, coupled with the focus on the perspective of the young black males who experience father absenteeism as opposed to the academic emphasis on the

fathers' perspective, may place this research in a position where new and relevant understandings of father absenteeism can be discovered and critically analysed.

Methodology

Research Questions

1) What are the experiences of young black males growing up without their biological fathers within the South African context?
2) How do young black males growing up without their fathers understand and conceptualise their own gendered identity and masculinity?
3) How do young black men growing up without their fathers make sense of fatherhood?

Research Design

Introduction

This research paper made use of a qualitative research design which was guided by an interpretivist paradigm (Jackson II et al., 2007). While quantitative research focuses on measuring values represented by numbers and counts, qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpreting the experiences of individuals through the use of data such as case studies, observational sociohistorical texts, and the account of personal experiences through verbal and written dialect (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Jackson II et al., 2007). This paper's interpretative research questions sought to interrogate the realities of young black males experiencing fatherlessness and their understanding of themselves and the role of fatherhood, rather than merely answering the questions or linking variables (Schwartz-Shea & Yano, 2013). Through the interpretation and engagement of linguistic exchange, there was the potential to conceptualise the unique and idiosyncratic experiences of an individual (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The data was collected and the goals of the research paper were achieved within a limited time frame, with a focus on allowing the experience of young black male students admitted to The University of the Witwatersrand from different backgrounds to be highlighted.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is a multi-layered strategy of analysis which is primarily concerned with exploring the complexities and intricacies of the human experience through the insights given by human beings (Mohajan, 2018; Aspers & Corte, 2019). Qualitative research emphasises collecting data within a natural setting as this allows for the study to be constructed around the actual experiences of people, thus strengthening the research's validity (Creswell as cited in Mohajan, 2018). Furthermore, the collection of input from non-numerical data allows for a more inductive interpretation of the experiences and perceptions of people (Aspers & Corte, 2019). A qualitative research design was considered to be well suited to explore the experiences of young black males growing up without their fathers for several reasons: this research study aimed to explore and grasp the complex experiences of father absenteeism through the lens of young black males and its relation to their socially-constructed gendered identity. Furthermore, there was a desire to gain insights into how young black males perceive their own gendered identity and their position as a man in society (Mohajan, 2018l Aspers & Corte, 2019). These aims supported the choice of a qualitative design which allowed for a complex and in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences.

Interpretivist Paradigm

An interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand the unique experience of human beings (Guba & Lincoln as cited in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This paradigm wishes to enter the minds of participants of the study, so to speak, and seeks to interpret what the participant is thinking or conceptualising (Guba & Lincoln as cited in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). With an emphasis being placed on the participants' understanding of their world and themselves, the interpretivist paradigm focuses on the socially constructed reality of the individual (Pham, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Consequently, the interpretivist paradigm is ontologically rooted in the view that reality is subjective as reality is experienced differently between individuals (Guba & Lincoln as cited in Scotland, 2012). Due to reality being constructed by the individual, it is only through linguistic expressions and languages by which one's reality can be expressed, moulded, and interpreted by individuals who seek to listen and understand another human's explanation of their reality (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Scotland, 2012).

Methodologically, the interpretivist paradigm focuses on systematic analysis and reorganisation of data collected (Hiller, 2016). While there are various viewpoints to understanding interpretivism, for the sake of this study, a phenomenological scope was utilised. Phenomenology refers to the methodological study of lived experiences and seeks to explore how an individual's lived experience shapes reality (Valle et al. as cited in Laverty, 2003; Delve & Limpeacher, 2022). This paradigm was central to achieving the goals of this research study for several reasons. It is through the linguistic expressions of the participants of this study that it was possible to attain an understanding of how father absenteeism has shaped young black males' perceptions of fatherhood, themselves, and their position as a male in society. These subjective experiences of the same phenomena allowed for the full picture of the effect that absent fathers have on their children. With the use of focus groups as well as individual interviews being chosen as the methods of data collection, approaching the data phenomenologically was vital due to the interpretative nature of the research questions. Moreover, there was a need for intricate and repetitive reorganisations and interpretations of the data collected as immersing oneself as a researcher in the data was vital.

Participants

Participants of this research paper were drawn from the pool of young black males who attend the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The criteria used for participation were full-time black male students, between the ages of 19 and 24 years old, registered at Wits. This specific age group allowed me as a researcher to gain insight into the ongoing experience of fatherlessness and the effect it had on their understanding of their own gendered identities. It also allowed for the interrogation of how young black males make sense of fatherhood fairly soon after their childhood development and adolescent experience that did not entirely include their biological father.

Data Collection

The sample was created using a non-probability convenience sampling method through which participants were invited to participate in a focus group and individual interviews (Sims & Waterfield, 2019). Non-probability convenience sampling is a sampling method where members

of a target population meet certain practical criteria that make them easily accessible to the research and the goals of the research through geographical proximity, availability at the time of the study, and willingness to volunteer (Sims & Waterfield, 2019). Convenience sampling allows for the collection of data to be done in a swift and economically viable manner. This study collected data from The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) where full-time black male students between the ages of 19 and 24 years were eligible to participate in the study. An email was sent with an information sheet (Appendix A) to students enrolled at Wits. This particular age group had been chosen due to their proximity to growing up without their biological father and their novice experiences of entering adulthood without their biological fathers present. Thus, this may bring about first-hand knowledge of the actual perceptions, experiences and understandings that arise from a child who has grown up without their biological father (Malherbe & Kaminer, 2020). This non-probability convenience sampling allowed for the research paper to be completed swiftly as sampling through the university reduced the time spent on finding potential participants. This large sampling pool allowed for a variation of perspectives and experiences which then strengthened the possibility that the insights gained through this research could potentially contribute to a deeper understanding of the broader young black male population in South Africa (Sedgwick, 2013).

A focus group and individual semi-structured interviews were used to obtain data for this research study. A focus group is a data collection method which brings a small group of individuals together to discuss and answer questions in a moderated setting (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Focus groups are seen as a mix of an organised or structured meeting, and a more conversational discussion that is spontaneous and fluid (Sims & Waterfield, 2019). Focus groups that are well thought out usually last between 1 to 2 hours and include enough participants which highlight diversity in the input provided, but not too many participants to ensure that comfortability in sharing personal opinions and experiences is maintained (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The individual semi-structured interview is a data collection method which focuses on asking questions and providing prompts within a predetermined thematic framework (Jamshed, 2014). This data collection method is highly effective when seeking out personal and sensitive information from an individual where there is more security for personal disclosure (Guest et al., 2017).

Thus, this research study made use of a focus group which included 5 participants which was facilitated by the researcher, as well as individual semi-structured interviews with 6 separate participants. The focus group met once for two hours and forty-three minutes. The 6 semi-structured individual interviews varied between thirty minutes and one hour. These methods of data collection allowed for the interrogation of the experiences and understandings that young black males have about fatherhood as well as themselves. The focus group provided insights into how individuals think whilst also providing a platform where the highlighted phenomena could be explored and understood (Nagel & Williams, 2013). Furthermore, interaction and non-verbal communication allowed for possible links between the different topics that this research paper attempted to tackle, and explored deductive themes and implicit meanings behind the discursive conversations (Nagle & Williams, 2013). In addition, the use of individual semi-structured interviews further strengthened the findings of the research as in-depth discourse enriched the data. These discussions were audio recorded and transcribed with the consent of the participants.

Data Analysis

Due to the layered and interpretative nature of this research, a thematic analysis was used as it is a method through which implicit and explicit themes can be identified, critically analysed and discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). To understand the possible links between fatherhood, gendered identity and the experience of young black males experiencing fatherlessness, the thematic analysis allowed for common themes and similarities among the participants to be identified through comparative analysis and interpretative discussion of and around the in-depth data collected through a focus group (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Massey, 2011). This allowed for all aspects of the research questions to be interrogated. This research paper made use of the following six steps on how to utilise thematic analysis:

Step 1 – The researcher became acquainted with the data. This was important due to the large amounts of transcripts which arose from the data collection process as well as the in-depth conversations during the focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2017).

Step 2 – The researcher produced codes from the data obtained from the focus group and the semi-structured individual interviews which acted as the hallmark for the implicit elements which are seen as meaningful (Braun & Clarke, 2006); Howitt & Cramer, 2017). This allowed the researcher to organise data into relevant groups and underlying themes.

Step 3 – Once the data had been coded and grouped into meaningful categories, a list of possible codes was identified from the data collected by the researcher. This was followed by the organisation of the comprehensive themes through the critical analysis of said codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022). This critical analysis focused more on latent themes as this study explored the experiences of father absenteeism and young black males' understandings of their gendered identity

Step 4 – The researcher filtered potential themes identified and removed themes that may not have contributed to the overall goals of the research study (Braun & Clarke; Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Refinement was also achieved through the absorption of certain themes by another as well as the breakdown of one theme into separate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Step 5 – Once an intricate thematic web of data had been developed, the researcher defined and critically discussed the themes, the links between the data and specific themes, and ultimately interrogated the importance of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2022). Each theme identified was intricately analysed with a social constructivist viewpoint. This allowed for patterns found within the focus group and semi-structured interviews around fatherhood, father absenteeism, as well as their gendered identity and experiences to be intricately analysed.

Step 6 – A final critical analysis and report of the themes were produced by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Howitt & Cramer, 2017). The validity of the data about the aims and goals of the research paper was taken into account. This included looking at how the themes aligned or deviated from the literature on fatherhood, gendered identity and the experiences of young black males growing up without their biological fathers were critically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2017).

Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge the role the researcher plays in the process of conducting a research study (Haynes, 2012). Reflexivity refers to the awareness of the role a researcher plays in the research study and how they influence the objectives, methodologies and outcomes of the study they are conducting (Haynes, 2012). This process of reflection involves critically interrogating one's preconceived judgements, practices, and belief systems and acknowledging how they influence the data collection and analysis processes of a research study (Delve & Limpeacher, 2022). Reflexivity emphasises acknowledging and questioning one's own biases and assumptions that one may bring into the research study (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Delve & Limpeacher, 2022). Within a qualitative study such as this, reflexivity is crucial, as the preconceived notions, biases, and implicit prejudices that the researcher may bring forth to the research study can influence how the rich and subjective data is collected, the methodological approaches are chosen, how the data is critically analysed, and how the data is critically discussed (Delve & Limpeacher, 2022).

It is important to acknowledge that as a young black male, my positionality could not be ignored throughout the collection, analysis, and discussion of the data that was used within this research study. As a young black male, the constant navigation through a democratic South Africa was built upon a discriminatory and anti-black base structure which influences my biases and prejudices that may make their way into the conduction of a research study. This coupled with my beneficiary position in a misogynistic and patriarchal society, as well as my own experience with a present father, placed me as a researcher in a position where my experiences influenced the direction of and reasoning around this study. It is my experience as a young black male who grew up with a present father which had a great influence on this research study, as this experience influenced my reasoning for this study, how I critically analysed the themes that arose, and how I articulated the discourse that came from the data. I had to be continuously aware that my understanding of the participants came from a place of implicit ignorance as I sought to understand the experience of young black males growing up without a father. As a researcher, the use of a reflexive journal and my psychodynamic therapy was pivotal in maintaining reflexivity in this research study (Limpeacher, 2022; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Identifying the feelings that each

stage of the research study brought, the biased viewpoints that may have arisen, and making sense of the experience of interrogating father absenteeism are just some of the reflexive notes made through my reflexive accounts of the research study which benefitted the overall study (Limpeacher, 2022; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Moreover, the supervisor-supervisee relationship within the study allowed for collaborative reflexivity where blind spots unknown to the researcher were made known through the interrogation of my assumptions and beliefs (Bieler et al. as cited in Olmos-Vegas, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

In research, ethics is a fundamental part that ensures the protection of the participants' dignity, well-being and legal rights (Akaranga & Makau, 2016; Holt, 2012). This is an important part of formulating a research study as the researcher needs to ensure that the emotional, physical, and social safety of the potential participants is considered at all levels of the study (Cacciattolo, 2015; Howitt & Cramer, 2017). There are several ethical considerations which need to be held in mind throughout the execution of this research study. In particular, issues of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, storage of information, and the possible emotional or psychological impact on participants needs which needed to be held in mind.

Informed consent is an ethical and legal requirement for research where a participant is given the rundown of all the layers of the study for them to decide whether they will willingly volunteer to participate in the research (Nijhawan et al., 2013). Through this, informed consent seeks to acknowledge the autonomy of the participants and protect them from any harm the research may bring (Tolich, 2008). Due to the fluid nature of focus groups, it was important to point out that discussion points may have ventured away from the intended scope, and participants may challenge the moderator's position (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). This was addressed through the information sheet (Appendix A), and the Focus Group Consent Form (Appendix B).

Anonymity and confidentiality refer to the extent to which identifiable characteristics are disguised to protect the participant's identity and the agreement made between the participants and researcher that no disclosure of the participants' identity, personal information and certain insights

made with anyone other than the research team unless stated otherwise respectively (Wiles et al., 2008; Sims & Waterfield, 2019). Both anonymity and confidentiality had to be addressed in the information sheets and informed consent forms, as potential participants need to understand how their anonymity and confidentiality may not be maintained within a focus group, while also helping them understand how the researcher will maintain confidentiality and anonymity within the research analysis and discussion of the data as well as with regards to the individual interviews. The research study made use of pseudonyms for each participant to ensure that participants were not identifiable. Audio recordings were stored in password-protected .zip files on a password-protected laptop. Communication between the supervisor and supervisee was conducted on password-protected Gmail accounts, laptops, phones, and in-person discussions. A focus group confidentiality agreement and a consent form were distributed between the participants and me as a researcher to ensure that they knew that they could not share information shared within the focus group ethically. Confidentiality and anonymity between the participants could not be guaranteed due to the personal experiences and views on fatherhood and identity being shared between each other. A Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix D) was handed to each participant to help alleviate the possibility of breach of confidentiality and, thus, attempt to maintain confidentiality within the focus group.

It was the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that an adequate explanation and continued openness to intricately explain each detail of the research was given, as poor understanding by participants posed ethical issues if that was the case (Jefford & Moore, 2008). For this research in particular, the option for psychotherapy and therapeutic services at The Emthonjeni Centre was offered to participants if they sought out such services.

Results

This section outlines the themes identified following a content analysis of the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The themes have been identified and described, and quotations from the participants have been included to illustrate and enrich the descriptions of the identified themes. The emerging themes from the data have been considered within the context of relevant literature. The table below summarises the themes and sub-themes.

Themes	**Sub-Themes**
Theme 1: The Desire to be Heard	1.1. A Non-Judgemental Platform for Discourse 1.2. A Catalyst for Self-Discovery 1.3. Togetherness
Theme 2: The Reason For Absence	2.1. Intentional Father Absenteeism 2.2. Absence Through Death
Theme 3: The Internalised Father	3.1. The Internalised Persecutory and Intentionally Absent Father 3.2. The Identification of The Dead Father
Theme 4: The Conceptualisation of Fatherhood	4.1. The Mirroring Experience of Fatherhood 4.2. Fatherhood and Resourcefulness 4.3. Social Fathers and 'Social Media' Fathers
Theme 5: Identity and Positionality	5.1. The Absence of Concept of Self 5.2. The Internalisation of Societal Perceptions

Theme 1: The Desire to be Heard

The data showed that what brought most of the participants to speak about their experiences of father absenteeism was a desire to be heard. This desire was marked with an emphasis on the need for a platform where their different experiences, outcomes, and feelings towards growing up without their biological father could be engaged through discourse. The participants highlighted

the importance of speaking in a non-judgemental space where their unique experiences could be acknowledged without being underplayed or dismissed due to the prevalence within the black South African context. This desire for a non-judgemental space also signalled a desire for togetherness and a search for other young black men who have had experiences and similar feelings of, and around father absenteeism, even with the distinct differences in the intricacies of their individual lived experiences. Participants also sought to discuss their experiences with father absenteeism as a possible avenue of self-discovery as they have found difficulty doing so in parts of their lives due to the perceived societal expectations placed on them. This theme is divided into three sub-themes, described below.

1.1. A Non-Judgemental Platform for Discourse

A distinct pattern identified within the data was a desire for a platform where they can engage in the difficult and taboo discussion of and around father absenteeism, as well as one's identity and positionality in society as a black male:

"... not a lot of people talk about it despite the fact that, you know, most black children in this country don't live with their dad, so they don't have a present father in their lives." – Thabo

With many South African children growing up without their biological fathers, this experience can be regarded as a social issue (Mafokane, 2015; Salami & Okeke, 2018). While this is the case, there has been a lack of discourse around the reasons for, and the impacts of father absenteeism (Mavungu, 2013; Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). Like many others who participated in the study, Thabo spoke to the commonality of father absenteeism amongst black families as well as the taboo nature that has thwarted discourse around their significant lived experiences. Participants identified that the few instances in which conversations around the experience of growing up without their biological fathers occurred, were marked with humour and dismissiveness as discussions with friends, family, as well as other avenues of socialisation largely made light of the topic of absent fathers. Participants reflected on how they often feel pressured to suppress their feelings around their experience and are ousted as shedding light on a topic of

discussion which brings more complications rather than engaging in a conversation which may allow for experiences to be acknowledged and validated.

"As a black man, it would be a bit weird if…I mean, none of us on my street had a father. Once I go back and be like, "Yeah, bafethu, come with me. We're going to talk to someone and all of us, one by one." You know, we'll kind of be like, "Dude, everything is okay.". "You know, why would you want to? Like, you know, just forgive it and let it go, you know, allow life to happen, you know, like you're doing good. Like there's no reason to visit that part of yourself." You know, that would generally be like they would have opinion they would have, you know. But for me it was a very objective, 'ou know…yeah." – Jabu

In his individual interview, Jabu spoke to the desire to speak and to be heard as the initiation or opportunities of discussion are oftentimes met with alienation and active efforts to suppress any attempts to unpack and understand feelings and viewpoints which have arisen as part of their experience of father absenteeism. This feeling of alienation and a desire to be heard manifests as an internal conflict around the opportunity to speak about their lived experiences as many participants spoke about their anxious eagerness and excitement as well as an enthusiastic anticipation of what may come from engaging with their lived experiences. This is coupled with a desire to shed light on their own unique experiences which some participants perceive as being neglected, or as going unnoticed within the multifaceted aspects of father absenteeism discourse:

"*I can talk about [the] environment I grew up in, okay, Jozi, Hillbrow to be precise. So the environment, everyone knows Jozi, it's ghetto, it's hood, survival of the fittest and all that, right? So, now what does the absence of a father mean in that particular environment?...You need to defend yourself, you know, so at times you find yourself…if you don't have anyone to look up to, I can't be calling my mom in the streets like, 'Mom, abafana, the boys there, eish…' I can't…So now if there is no man present for you during your stages of life when you grow up, if there is no man present there, you are bound to face a lot of challenges that men face at a young age alone." – Thapelo*

In touching on his own unique experience of growing up in the hostile inner city of Johannesburg and how the lack of a father figure exacerbates the contextual difficulties and typical coming-of-age circumstances, Thapelo spoke to a sentiment shared amongst participants in describing the desire to articulate the different experiences of living without a biological father. Other participants touched on how they engaged with their reality of father absenteeism through their own lens in terms of their class, their experiences of knowing their father's location, knowing and interacting with their father's other family and half-siblings as well as aspects of identity which include masculinity and sexuality. Subsequently, there appears to be a strong desire for their experience to be discussed and critically interpreted in a non-judgemental and open-minded manner.

1.2. A Catalyst for Self-Discovery

The participants linked their desire to speak about their experiences to a wish for self-development. The data showed that many participants feel that pushing themselves to speak about their lived experience of father absenteeism allows for them to discover and unpack parts of themselves that haven't been fully explored and acknowledged.

"It just feels like a part of yourself that you haven't explored yet and it's just standing there, right. And when I received the email, similar to what he said, it sparked something that, okay cool, maybe this is something I'm supposed to speak about or attend to." – Karabo

As seen in the extract above, many participants shared similar sentiments with Karabo as there was an internal pull to explore a part of themselves that seemed untethered. The desire to be heard and the taboo nature of father absenteeism, specifically, within the black South African context, appears to have slowed the process of speaking about their experiences as well as the exploration of their identity as their desires are in conflict with societal responses to father absenteeism. This was also reflected by Bandile within the focus group as he reflected on the ongoing process of self-exploration and the active efforts that he and others who participated are making in regard to self-discovery.

"I recently discovered the effects of growing up without my father present, so I was in a process where I am dealing with…so yeah, it's just that continuation of the journey that I'm doing or liking to move to about what happening." – Bandile

Interviews showed that participants have found themselves on an active journey towards discovering more about themselves as well as how father absenteeism has contributed to their lived experience. While there have been moments where their experiences are touched on, such as humorous engagements with friends, participants speak about the desire to discuss their experiences in an in-depth manner. Participants reflected on their desire for spoken engagement and the therapeutic experience of putting words to their lived experiences. A core element of a psychotherapeutic relationship, amongst others, is the operative process of the exchange of words (Marx et al., 2017). Psychotherapy has been described as a 'talking cure' where the interaction and exchange of words unearths and explores features of an individual's life (Breuer & Freud as cited in Marx et al., 2017; Rizzuto, 2008). Participants acknowledged and desired platforms where conversations can be had for a necessary catharsis or release of their experience, their repressed emotions, and the effects of their experience that have influenced other aspects of their lives (Breuer & Freud as cited in Marx et al., 2017; Watts & Hook, 2013). Participants implicitly touched on psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic features such as symbolism and narration where representations of their father's absence were explored through their description of their experience of father absenteeism (Marx et al., 2017).

1.3. Togetherness

A key theme amongst the participants was a desire for an experience of togetherness as many spoke about the isolating experience that growing up without their biological father as a black male where there is no guidance from a paternal figure, very few platforms to speak about their experiences, and thus minimal discourse around the similar feelings that are experienced by others who go through similar experiences.

"I mean, as much as we all come from different parts of life…it's like we're going through the same thing just in different ways, you know? there is a matter of, okay, I'm not alone in the world,

you know. You understand that, you know, if someone else is probably going through the same thing as you, but you've never really seen it happening, you know? It's like, okay, maybe I'm not alone in this situation because a lot of us are, I believe that…this is a big unresolved issue, you know, and in us being able to express it feel[s] like…it's a bit of a relief to me." – Rrapula

In the focus group discussion, Rrapula spoke about the common sense of togetherness felt in the discussion as the opportunity to find comradery in speaking about something which has been suppressed through societal and intrapersonal processes, as well as the difficulties and feelings which have arisen due to their experience of father absenteeism. While participants acknowledged their means of withdrawal and isolation, features prevalent amongst people who have experienced father absenteeism, participants have expressed a desire for a space where they can discuss and engage with their experience and immerse themselves in a community where they do not feel alone. As seen in the extract below, Sabelo touched on a shared feeling of the lack of openness and engagement of father absenteeism and its effects on those within a black family unit as the lack of discourse has partly hindered open feelings of emotions as well as the freedom of expression amongst young black males growing up without their biological fathers. In some regard, the literature mirrors this as there is a paucity of literature which articulates and highlights the need to be heard.

"It's refreshing to know that there's other people going through the same thing, you know, and I feel like it's good to have these discussions so that, you know, that one; you're not alone and that two; the things you you're thinking are not wholly, like, unique to you. Your situation is relatable to a lot of people and you did say earlier, there's something wrong with black families, that's such a prominent thought that I've been thinking about and I think just talking about it is so important. I feel like, I don't know, black families don't talk enough about stuff." - Sabelo

Theme 2: The Reason for Absence

The data demonstrated that what differentiated the participants was their unique encounters with father absenteeism and the reasons for absence. There were two understandings of the reasons for absence; firstly, some participants described how their biological fathers made an active and

overt decision to not be present in their lives even when the opportunity to do so was evident, whilst others identified the absence of a father through death. Each of these reasons contributed differently to the particular ways in which absence was internalised. These two sub-themes are explored below.

2.1. Intentional Father Absenteeism

"There is someone who is anti-you like, but anti everything you represent, anti your dream, anti your stability, whether it's emotional, financial, like they [are] just anti-you, you know? Like anything that can support you or can steer you towards a good life, that [is] just anti that you know, like, if you thought stability was a thing, just to find them like choking your mother [at] like 6AM…Even if they're like pro-them, but it doesn't discount the fact that pro-them can also be like anti-you, like, "Yeah, no. I'm not having stability in this house, I'm going to be moving away.". Like you know, like it's fine. That's a pro-you move, like…you're taking care of you and I can respect that, you know? But it doesn't stop at you, you know? You can't just view this from one facet, you know?" – Jabu

From his individual interview, Jabu describes the shared reality of other participants who expressed that their biological father's multi-layered absence has been experienced as an active decision which benefitted themselves as individuals in many ways, and disregarded and did not consider the effects it had on the participants as their fathers' sons. The data showed how participants perceived the reasons for their biological fathers' absence as an act which only considered their fathers' livelihoods and failed to think about how their absence from their son's lives and upbringing affected them. As if their sons were invisible to them. This intentional absenteeism was expressed by Kamo in his individual interview where he described how his father was forced by his family to have a child out of wedlock due to the struggles of having a child with his wife. Coincidently, both his father's wife and Kamo's mother fell pregnant, which resulted in Kamo being born out of wedlock and having a half-brother born months apart from each other, both of whom had different experiences of their biological father.

"…but, so my experience with my dad was always centered around that, you know, and, 'you have to know your place.'. That was everything…that I would get from him, you know, in most situations like, 'You have to know your place. You have to know that I'm married.', and that something he used to tell me from as early as I think, what, like 7 years old? That I have to know my place, and I have to know he's married, and I have to respect his marriage, and I have to not call at certain times, and I have to not ask for certain things…" – Kamo

Kamo's experience speaks to the societal correlation of fatherhood to manhood as his father was expected to take up the role of fatherhood to achieve a sense of manhood (Richter & Morrell, 2006; Madhavan et al., 2008). In speaking about his experience with intentional father absenteeism, Kamo explained how his father set boundaries to ensure that his desires and priorities are respected whilst disregarding the responsibilities that come with impregnating two people at once. Kamo describes how he was forced to respect his father's decision even when there were possible avenues to communicate and connect. This common experience of knowing where their biological father's residence and presence in other environments while experiencing a contrasting absence was emphasised by other participants as they described knowing where their fathers lived or later discovering that their fathers had families that they chose to take care of. This intentional father absenteeism experience not only speaks to their multifaceted absence from the participants' lives physically, financially, and emotionally but also speaks to their initial experience of their father when there were moments that there was physical presence as participants highlighted how their fathers made decisions which did not consider them as their sons. Participants touched on the varying dimensions of fatherhood where locality, resourcefulness and emotional support are just a few of the many aspects of fatherhood that were absent in their experience of absenteeism (Madhavan et al., 2008; East et al., 2018). Many participants spoke about their father's absence even when they were partially present as there was a lack of emotional nurturance or consideration in their fathers' actions, parts of fatherhood that are as instrumental to a child's development as resourcefully supporting a child (Richter & Morrel, 2006; East et al., 2018).

The data also showed how intentional father absenteeism experience discussed by many participants was linked to a separation between their parents, as many spoke about how their fathers' absence is closely related to the manner in which they disconnected from their role of

being a father after the separation of their relationship with their mothers. This was a significant aspect of their experience as it reflected on how they perceived their fathers as not only distancing themselves from being a partner as there was also the distancing of co-parenting which occurred:

"Yeah, when I was, I don't know, four, five, three, he was still in a relationship with my mother and yeah, he used to be present and… I don't know, when they broke up, but he used to be present and then…then there was the time when he disappeared." - Bandile

In the focus group discussion, Bandile described how his father's actions following the separation of his parents were experienced as an intentional father absenteeism experience where his father vanished from his life and left him without a paternal figure. Within the absence of their fathers, participants implicitly highlighted the lack of understanding for their father's absence as many participants were not given a clear reason for growing up without a biological father, which further speaks to the desire to be heard and acknowledged, and a sense of togetherness within an isolating experience of father absenteeism. Amongst reasons such as unemployment and poor socio-economic position, separation and divorce were prominent reasons that participants made sense of their father's absence (Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020; Mavungu, 2013). This is significant given that many participants expressed that there was a lack of reasoning around their father's absence as opposed to what has been highlighted within research around father absenteeism. The data showed that some participants appeared to be left without a tangible reason for their father's absence which could be linked to the silence which seems to surround paternal absence within families. In many ways, this mirrors the challenges of defining father absenteeism as we all as the commonality of absent fathers within a South African context as the lack of understanding of what father absenteeism entails, what the effects of this social phenomenon and how father absenteeism manifests in the lives of the children affected (East et al, 2006; Makofane, 2015).

2.2. Absence through Death

The data showed a significant experience of absence through the death of the father. This included growing up without their father due to their fathers' death at a young age, as well as experiencing a present father who passed away during their upbringing.

"I remember him taking me to…those little graduations abo' Grade R…I remember him taking me and my mom to the beach, to wimpy…and then my last memory of him was on his deathbed…." – Rrapula

Much like Rrapula, participants who had experienced a present father who became absent through death reflect on a more concrete reason for their father's absence which allows for a differing experience and perspective of father absenteeism. This is similar to another participant who had lost their father when he was seven years after his father was gunned down. Participants with this particular experience of father absenteeism express fond memories of their father. Losing one's father through death has shown more positive emotions and an attachment to their deceased fathers which can be linked to Melanie Klein's conceptualisation of a coping mechanism called idealisation (East et al., 2006; Klein, 1996). Klein described idealisation as the over-exaggeration of the positive qualities of oneself or another object (Klein, 1996; Watts & Hook, 2013). This is a coping mechanism which is used to deal with conflicting emotions and internal and external stressors that are masked by the exaggeration of these perceived positive qualities. This is seen in how some participants who experience absence through death reflect on the perceived positive qualities of their deceased fathers to grapple with the difficult feelings around their absence. Participants who have experienced absence through death hold on to the idea of a present and good father. This is different from another participant who had experienced absenteeism throughout their life before losing their father through death. Similar to other participants, Sabelo spoke about how his father had other families and children he was accounting for whilst detaching from the responsibilities of being his father. Subsequently, Sabelo, who had experienced his father as absent in both life and death, experienced his father as both an unexplainable, intentionally absent father as well as a father, absent through his passing.

Theme 3: The Internalised Father

A significant theme that the data showed was the participants' internalisation of their father as well as their father's absence. Internalisation refers to the unconscious adoption or traits of others and attributing them to oneself (Lemma, 2003). At the root of this process is the mental

representation of an object such as an absent father (Gill, 1991; Rose et al., 2018). The internalised father covertly and overtly shaped how the participants conceptualise their internal world as well as their interactions with their environment. There is a pattern in which participants internalise their father's absence, whether it be through an internalised intentional father absenteeism experience or absence through death as their fathers' absence is present in how they interact with themselves and others. This theme is distilled through two sub-themes, below.

3.1. The Internalised Persecutory and Intentionally Absent Father

A consistent pattern within the data shows that many participants identify and wish to acknowledge that their fathers' absence shaped them to a certain extent. Participants separate their fathers from any direct and adaptive contributions to their lives but acknowledge that their fathers' absence has shaped their identity and perceptions of the world. Features of resiliency and adaptability are seen as by-products of their fathers' absence as virtually all participants were placed in a position in which they had to adapt and find a sense of resiliency and solitude largely due to their father's absence.

"The moment you are put in a position to survive, you adapt and that's who you become, that's who I've become myself. I've learned to adapt, I've learned to survive without anybody's help, 'trial and error' and all of that. And I've received compliments from people right?...Because of that it has helped me to be who I am right now. I'm not happy with who I am. I felt that there are certain things that are missing, but then I can survive in this cold world." – Xolani

Within the focus group discussion, Xolani highlights a common experience of being forced to figure out life lessons and their lived experience through a trial and error basis as for them to reach the current position that they are in their life, they have been forced to do so without significant paternal guidance or mirroring of a positive paternal figure that they were able to internalise. Through his theory of self-psychology, Kohut conceptualised a child's need for mirroring, where a child experiences a caregiver, or self-object, who recognises and affirms the capabilities and emotions of the child whilst allowing the child to emotionally latch onto a caregiver that is experienced as a representation of themselves (Swartz, 2013; Wanamaker, 2012).

Kohut argued that this is an essential experience for the adaptive development of the self and one's esteem and identity (Swartz, 2013; Banai & Shaver, 2005). Instead of experiencing a positive paternal figure that they could experience this mirroring or what Kohut coins as a self-object experience, many participants were only able to internalise the absence of a paternal figure as well as their perceptions around and the feelings towards the reasons for their absence. While Kohutian theory traditionally looks at the mother-child relationship, it can be argued that the lack of a paternal figure, in part, contributed to internalising and externalising behaviours where participants touched on feelings of withdrawal and anxiety, as well as acting out behaviours which reflected feelings of anger towards their father's absence (Rose et al., 2018). The internalisation and projection of their feelings towards their fathers' absence were filtered through their lens and manifested in ways which included instances in which their feelings around the reason for absence were projected onto others.

Um, for a long time, I held on to a lot of anger. You know like that license to shoot that I was tell you [about], you know? Like, I held onto a lot of anger and, like, just pushed off a lot of people, trampled on a lot of people…I had close to zero honesty. Like, I just didn't care, like I really, I just didn't care…like somehow, I had to translate this pain that was inside to my surroundings as well, you know? like I really tried my best to, like, be a reflection of what I was feeling on the inside, you know? I did so many messed up things in the process." - Jabu

Jabu expressed how his feelings of anger were projected outwardly to his surroundings as he internalised his father's absence and projected his experience to detach from the feelings that the absence had brought him. Projection is a process which involves aspects of oneself or emotions which are harboured by an individual and are placed on another individual (Lemma, 2003). Amongst children, projections involve acting-out behaviour which oftentimes reflects aggressive, or disruptive behaviour (Rose et al., 2018). Internalised behaviours amongst children can go unnoticed as they are not overtly seen and they can include feelings of anxiety, depression, as well as withdrawal (Rose et al., 2018). Maladaptive internalisations tend to negatively impact a child's psyche and internal world more than their environment (Rose et al., 2018.). The difficulty of sitting with the feelings of hurt caused by the absence of a father was also seen in Sihle's individual interview; he described how his father's absence through death resulted in his internalised feelings

being projected outwardly to his mother, the only available object in his external world. He expressed that the pain experienced within his bereavement was projected onto his mother as feelings of resentment and hatred for the uncontrollable absence of his father were projected onto her. This projection was also influenced by his experience of his mother's own bereavement and mourning as due to the loss of her partner; the participant experienced the loss of both parents through physical absence and momentary emotional absence due to bereavement.

The projection of the internalised father not only included their emotional state but also tangible aspects of father absenteeism as participants highlighted the desire to detach and reshape themselves outside of their relationship with their experience of an absent father. Participants reflected on the manner in which the lack of a paternal figure distorted their understanding of their surroundings as there was a lack of a mirroring paternal figure that could assist in their development.

"There's so many entry points for, like, distortions, you know, like distortions can come from a lot of places, you know? How to talk to women, how to handle yourself, how to take care of yourself, how to take care of your loved ones" – Jabu

Much like Jabu's description above, participants acknowledge that their experience of fatherlessness can negatively alter the ways in which they relate to their environment as well as their understanding of the ways they can conduct themselves. Studies have shown that father absenteeism has more significant effects on male children as social competence, behavioural and emotional regulation, as well as the modelling of socially appropriate male behaviour is heavily influenced by the presence of a paternal figure (Richter & Morrell, 2006). Participants express how their fatherless experience has slowed their social learning as there has been a lack of assistance and guidance in the intricacies of life. Moreover, the acknowledgement that they are a biological extension of their father furthers the process of internalisation as they experience their father's lack of presence, neglect and abandonment as a part of their identity which they wish to detach from and reshape through their own identity. Moreover, participants expressed an internalisation of what their absent father represented, such as Thapelo in the extract below, where masculinity, resourcefulness and protection are features which have been instilled in the

participant's conceptualisation of their identity. To a certain degree, participants reflected that representations of their absent father which they may embody or are linked to are perceived as bad parts which they wish to get rid of. Furthermore, the good parts which their fathers lacked are something which they wish to personify.

"I lost my father at a young age, you know My mom is struggling, she's doing whatever she can. I also, it's like I'm competing with her to be the man of the house. I don't want her to suffer, you know? Those instincts, I'm protective, I'm the first son, not the first born, I have a sister, but I'm the first son….I've always wanted to be the father that I never had." - Thapelo

3.2. The Identification of The Dead Father

A key theme amongst the participants who identify their biological father's absence through death is a specific identification with the ways in which their fatherless experience has manifested internally and externally:

"Yeah, it was shocking. I mean, but the way I interpret it is that, okay, he went out like a real man should, you know? Because I remember this one time I was in Vaal, for my friend's graduation party. So we were drunk, and then we were going to the toilet and [stammers] when you get drunk, you get a bit rowdy. And then, so I was like, 'Yo, if anyone pulls a gun right now…I don't mind going out the same way my dad did." You know, like, 'Hey, that's lineage', you know what I mean? So it's just like, yeah, I don't mind going out the same way he did, you know, more than anything and make me happy instead…" – Sihle

Sihle reflected on the experience and unique internalisation of, and identification with a father's absence through death. A profound part of bereavement is the process of identification where a person adopts the traits and features of another person and where there is an unconscious overhaul of the parts of another person (Bekes & Perry, 2020; Osterweis et al., 1984). This is a common coping mechanism and is more prominent among children who have lost their parents (Osterweis et al., 1984). In his experience, Sihle has identified and idealised the perceived masculinity that his father upheld through his death. The absence through death is not identified

as an intentional experience of father absenteeism, but rather a means by which they can relate to and identify as part of themselves as Sihle described below:

"So I guess, when they describe him to me, I guess his absence makes me want to be more like him, you know? Like, kind of like, you know, carry on the legacy of his being, you know? I guess that's the kind of... impact that his absence has on me with regards to my personality, yeah." – Sihle

In describing their father's impact on the type of man they are, participants emphasise the impact their absent fathers had on them where their brief memories and descriptions of their absent fathers are given through and internalised in such a way that their father's absence has a profound effect on the conceptualisation of their identity. Moreover, as with the internalised persecutory and intentionally absent fathers, participants who lost their fathers through death internalised the features of fatherhood which they did not experience and conceptualised those parts within their identity. Through an intricate analysis of the psychotherapeutic process of several young males aged between eight and twelve years who had lost their fathers through death, Blundell (2005) found that there was a conceptualisation of idealised fathers in their bereavement. This worked, in part, with the participants' desire to understand what being a father and what fatherhood entails, and what relation it has with their identity. The absence of a father contributed to many questions of what fatherhood looks like as there was a lack of a mirroring figure by which they could model what being a father is. Many participants spoke about the search for the answers to the general aspects of fatherhood such as the mirroring aspect, the responsibilities of a parent and the ways in which a father provides resourcefully and emotionally. Participants who have lost their fathers internalise their absence as an uncontrollable reality which significantly shifts the manner in which absence is projected outwardly.

"For me, the man, the man died, you know? So [like] you have said, I never really thought much about it because that comes to us all you know? So, I was like as I've been saying, I just charge it to the game and [it's] just the way it is, just the way life is, you know, you live, do some shit, you die. It left me stranded, right, but I've been able to pick myself up and keep on moving forward and that's about it, you know? it really burrowed a lot of independence in me and as much

as I do shut out and love people, you know. Because, I'm kind of [the] person who be like, you know, I can do it without you." - Rrapula

Participants who lost their father through death touch on the process of feelings towards the absence being internalised with minimal ways in which their feelings can be expressed or acknowledged. Like Rrapula above, feelings of loss appear to be lonesome as he describes being left stranded through this isolating feeling, withdrawal and overdependence was forcibly forged by life experiences while pushing those that he loves away from him as a means to protect himself from and project his experience of unexplainable feelings of abandonment.

Theme 4: The Conceptualisation of Fatherhood

A common theme that the data showed was the ways in which participants conceptualised fatherhood and what being a father entails. Participants highlighted how a father assists a child, particularly a son, in developing a sense of identity. A significant understanding of what being a father entails is the role of a guidance figure where fathers not only assist in shaping their son's sense of self through their own actions and behaviour, but also utilise the use of advice and the presence of a father through their child's journey through life. Participants also placed importance on financial and resourceful support as resourcefulness was emphasised as a feature of fatherhood that cannot go unacknowledged. Participants also highlighted the role of social fathers as well as social media fathers in the search for paternal guidance and the experience of fatherhood which they were not afforded. These themes are expanded on below.

4.1. The Mirroring Experience of Fatherhood

Participants highlighted that the words, behaviours, and presence of a father assist in guiding a child with conceptualising a sense of self and positionality in their social environments. This aligns with studies which have shown that fathers play an important role in the development of a child's self-identity (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). Psychoanalysts such as Kohut described the importance of a present caregiver to recognise and affirm the capabilities, emotions, and needs of a child whilst allowing said child to emotionally attach to them (Swartz, 2013; Wanamaker,

2012). Participants conceptualised this mirroring experience from a place of absence as they implicitly identify how their conceptualisation of fatherhood, identified and positionality would be more tangible and congruent to their experience if their biological fathers were present.

"*I think for most of my life, that word, it didn't have much of a meaning. It was always something that I just thought was just a word, you know, because I never, obviously, I didn't have a father, so [it] was never present in my life. so, for me it has no meaning really. Um, more so because of him being absent, it left fatherhood, and the word 'father' without a meaning for me." – Kamo*

Participants reflected on the absence and unfamiliarity of fatherhood and the challenge of putting into words what a father is or entails due to their direct experience of absence. It can be said that the inability to intuitively understand the experience of fatherhood has placed many participants in a position where they question what being a father is as well as what the experience of fatherhood looks like. In the search for what fatherhood necessitates, participants draw their understanding of what fatherhood is through their experience of having to father themselves throughout their lives as well as what they felt like they lacked within their experiences of father absenteeism.

"Hmm, 'father' and 'fatherhood'. I don't know, I have a weird relationship with the idea of fatherhood because it's not something I know. so it's like I can't really properly imagine it. So, like whenever I hear the word, 'father', the person I think of is myself, because I'm just imagining myself as a father because I never had that…So when I think 'father' I just think of myself much older." – Sabelo

As seen with Sabelo above, participants expressed difficulty in conceptualising and picturing how fatherhood and what a father is due to their experience of father absenteeism. In many ways, this absence mirrors an absence of conceptualisation and a sense of identity and positionality due to the lack of a paternal mirroring experience. What the data also showed was a common understanding of paternity as being one of guidance and support.

"Yeah, so parents, I mean are essentially just your guardians. They help hold your hand until you're ready to walk by yourself essentially. And even then, you know, you need someone to fall back on. That's the people you rely on. So, from a strictly biological perspective, you know, they are the people who bring you into the world and help nurture you and make sure that you're safe, protected. But from an emotional perspective, I mean, they're essentially your guidance as to how to navigate around the world and make sure that you understand who you are, how the world works within their own definitions. Uh, yeah, I think just people who are there to help watch and oversee you and love you from point A to point B until you're able to do that yourself." – Thabo

In the extract above, Thabo looks at fatherhood under the umbrella term of 'parenthood' where he expresses the multifaceted aspects of guidance, protection, and support that many other participants highlight. Participants express how the presence of a father allows for the ability to depend on a paternal figure for guardianship, nurturance, and protection. Paternal guidance is conceptualised as intrinsically different from maternal guidance and the level of nurturance which mothers have provided them as participants expressed that fatherhood encompasses a sense of guidance which is also nurturing but firm. Moreover, studies have shown that there have been significant links between father absenteeism to a male children's social skills, behavioural and emotional regulation measures, and the ability to model socially appropriate masculine behaviours (Richter & Morrell, 2006). Within the South African context, participants reflected on the affirmed notion that father involvement within this context is centred around guidance and protection (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Maurer & Pleck, 2006). The data showed a common acknowledgement that their mothers played a pivotal role in their upbringing and the development of who they are. Albeit, participants expressed that an aspect of fatherhood is the ability to experience a sense of guidance as well as an experience of a paternal figure who can guide an individual through their own experiences as a young black male, something which Sihle described below.

"Yeah, basically a guidance figure and also, like, you know someone I can, like, you know, vent to as well, you know? Like this, 'This thing happened', you know? Because, I mean at home it's kind of difficult, you know, talking to my mom like…"Hey, this girl…", you know, and you know, "Hey, I kind of need to go to the hospital for this…", you know? Because that happened in

2015, I needed to go to like the doctor for something an then my mom was like, 'What do you need to go for?', I was like, 'Nah, just give me the medical aid and I'll go.' You know, I couldn't have that conversation because, you know, it'd be weird for us, yeah." – Sihle

While many participants expressed an open and significantly devoted relationship with their mothers, there is a challenge in terms of certain aspects in which they have difficulty communicating with their mothers due to their perceived misunderstandings that may be experienced that a father may directly understand from experience. Participants expressed that this is complimented by the nurturing role that they perceive fatherhood to also encompass as many reflected on the paternal role of nurturing the growth of their child.

4.2. Fatherhood and Resourcefulness

In relating their experiences of father absenteeism, participants expressed that a feature of fatherhood is not only the ability to provide guidance, protection, and a mirroring experience, but also the ability to be resourceful.

"But I think that we do live in a patriarchal society within South Africa, so patriarchal standards must stand within a patriarchal society. So a bad parent, a bad father rather by definition would be someone who is unable to support their child. I have my own, you know, my own…what can I say…ideas, not, well, not necessarily ideas, my own thoughts about that especially relating to black fatherhood. But I mean strictly within patriarchal definitions. So bad father, someone who cannot provide, can't protect their own child." – Thabo

In delving deeper into his understanding of black fatherhood Thabo touched on a common notion amongst other participants where resourcefully supporting one's children and family is an important feature that the role of a father entails. The data showed how the absence of a paternal figure financially impacted the lives of participants who had an experience of deprivation in varying degrees or a difficult journey which is perceived as a lived experience which would have been made easier with the presence of a father who provides financially and resourcefully. These are sentiments which are shown within academic literature where fatherhood and the concept of a

father entails the ability to provide financially and resourcefully, specifically within a South African Context (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Maurer & Pleck, 2006).

"…I guess financially [laughs], financially, basically. You know, paying full fees. I know 'cause my mom is paying my fees. So yeah, paying for fees, you know, paying for anything I need like, you know, let's just say for instance, I'm on a date or something like that and this girl just ordered like a bottle of wine whereas my budget was 500, you know? Just like, you know, calling him, like, 'Yo! I'm in this situation, like yo, can you send me like 600 or something like that?'." - *Sihle*

While participants experience support from their mothers, there is a desire for a paternal figure to also provide, especially in moments where a sense of masculinity is perceived as necessary to be upheld such as in Sihle's account above. Much like the experience of a mirroring paternal guidance figure, participants highlighted how the emotional experience of a paternal figure as well as the resourceful paternal figure is something which works in tandem within the realm of fatherhood.

4.3. Social Fathers and 'Social Media' Fathers

"Like you said, it's kind of hard to define something that you don't know, right? It's hard. Even though you might have simple words like 'protector' or 'guider' or stuff like that, it's very hard to define it according to what you know if you don't know it, right? So because of that, I found myself constantly searching for a father figure, right? And I've been doing this for a while and one thing I have to say, trial and error is painful, trial and error is so painful because you suffer quite a lot. Fine, you might fail, but then for you move on from that failure is twice as hard as actually trying, right? So I'd find myself constantly searching. I don't know how long I've been searching for a mentor or fatherly figure. I'd say I found a couple, but then they never worked out. It's either the person lives too far or it's either I cannot build a connection long enough or it's either some… some people are willing to give you advice, let's agree, but then sometimes you just cannot hear it, can't comprehend it, like it's hard to understand it for some reason." – Xolani

As described by Xolani above, participants expressed difficulty in fully grasping the experience of fatherhood due to the reality of growing up without their biological fathers. In their fluid discovery of who they are and their ongoing conceptualisation of the role of a father, the data showed that participants utilised their experience of external paternal figures such as uncles, fathers they have witnessed, as well as male social media figures such as Jordan Peterson as a means to seek out an understanding of what fatherhood may look like. Studies around social media, or communication and leisure, have found that media plays an important role in the transportation of social norms as well as the opportunity for these norms to be discussed and interrogated (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013; Kivel & Johnson, 2009). Features of identity such as gender and the power relations involving different social constructions of identity are also critically analysed and utilised by people such as participants to help conceptualise their inner and outer worlds (Dunlap & Johnson; Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). Participants expressed that media platforms such as social media applications and television are used to assist in their conceptualisations of fatherhood in the absence of their own biological fathers. Male figures such as Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychologist professor who has gained a following due to his interrogation and teachings of male identity and masculinity, or religious figures such as God in the Christian faith have been used as guidance figures to better conceptualise who they are and what manhood entails.

Theme 5: Identity and Positionality

Interviews showed that participants demonstrated an absence of a concept of self as well as an ongoing process of learning and reshaping the internalised parts of their lived experience which constitutes a prolonged discovery of self. The data also showed the internalisation of an influx of varying societal perceptions of manhood, masculinity, and fatherhood which is influenced by their ongoing experience of father absenteeism.

5.1. The Absence of Concept of Self

The data demonstrated that participants are in the process of conceptualising a sense of who they are as many have spoken about the challenges they have in thinking about who they are beyond tangible aspects of race and gender. While many participants identify that they are black

men, and some express their sexuality, participants express varying degrees and positions in life in which they conceptualise their identity as they navigate and seek to discover who they are.

"And in terms of identity, to be honest, I struggle with that I won't lie, it's a thing that's been on my mind for a while now. And to truly identify, just, I don't know, I don't know what to say. But then in my mind, right, to know who you are, that's identity, right? To know who you are, to actually know who you are is something that's not really described easily, right? It's not something that can be defined by just saying, 'this is who I am' and it's something I've constantly searched, like, for an answer to…" - Xolani

Participants expressed that there is an ongoing search for who they are beyond the aspects of demographic descriptions. There is an experience of an internal absence of self, which is mirrored in the external absence of a father. A large part of their identities is related to what they have been through and the by-products of their experience which includes the internalisation of the absence of their father and how it has pushed them to be the men that they lacked throughout their lives. Participants touched on the internalised aspects of their absent fathers and reflected on how they wished to reshape their future experiences in relation to their past experiences in such a way that they emulate the features that were not present. Part of this conceptualisation of who they are is dependent on the point in their lives that they are in as many participants speak from a point where they are discovering parts of themselves and their lived experience which has traumatised them as with Jabu in the extract below who appeared to be in the process of understanding his exposure to domestic violence and abandonment.

"I really haven't… speaking of identity, I haven't thought of myself a lot beyond the scope of y work, like as in academic, it's only now that I'm really starting to like, come back to like, 'Okay, when you subtract even academics, like what remains?', you know? But, I don't have, like a foot, like I don't have a stance rather….let me just put it like [stammers], you know, at this point now, I think I just represent, like, a black boy just fighting for his life, you know? And the only thing I have to celebrate is that life try to kill me every day for as long as I can remember and it hasn't. I'm just trying to make sure that I get to a point where, not that it doesn't matter, but I'm bigger than that, you know? I'm bigger than my past experiences, you know? I understand I can't

make them smaller, you know, they are quite significant, but to just grow as an individual, like grow in a different part of avenue and just consider myself in other spaces or in different place. Which is what you are asking me, but I'm figuring it out." – Jabu

5.2. The Internalisation of Societal Perceptions

A theme which the data demonstrated is that participants experience and highlight the prevalence of opinions on masculinity, fatherhood, and manhood on social media through social discourse as both a helpful but deterring part of their journey of self-discovery.

"Yeah, especially with like, you know how TikTok is and everything like, there are all these podcasts, you know that just, like, pile up on your For You Page on TikTok and it's just like, 'Yo, as a man you should be this.' And then next, it's a contradicting opinion from a female, 'You should be vulnerable.', and then next is like, 'Don't be vulnerable'. It's just like there's an influx, you know, an influx. And it's just like you don't know whose opinion to take because it's just like you don't have like, you know, your dad to like, you know, be like okay now, provide you with that guidance." – Sihle

With the ingestion of many differing opinions on social media, participants like Sihle expressed difficulty in navigating through the shifting dialogues, something which was further complicated by the absence of a paternal guidance figure. Participants also express the importance of certain discourses within social media as a means to better understand their positionality in society, with social media discussions such as #MenAreTrash assisting in understanding their positionality with other genders as well as other men, how they are perceived as black men within their environment. This further speaks to the ways in which social media can be used to interrogate various conceptualisations of different socially constructed features of identity, which poses both a beneficial part of self-discovery and also a difficult part of contemporary life that has to be digested without a guidance figure (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013; Kivel & Johnson, 2009).

Discussion

This section critically analyses the findings of the study and integrates the data with literature that speaks to the experience of father absenteeism, gendered identity and the correlations between the two. The data revealed themes which speak both in alignment with, and deviate from literature, both of which have been identified, interpreted and critically discussed below.

The study revealed that young black males growing up without their biological fathers within the South African context experience their father's absence as being an intentional decision to not participate in their lives even when there are opportunities to do so. The data showed how they have experienced their father's absence as a one-sided decision which only considers their father's livelihood whilst overlooking the residual effects that their absence has had on them as their sons. Studies have shown that the father-child relationship is one of the most important connections for the development of a child's value, social cues, and mental well-being (Mackey as cited in East et al., 2006; Rohner & Veneziano as cited in East et al., 2006). Father absenteeism has been shown to have significant links to poor self-images for children, and specifically a son's ability to react to social interactions and circumstances with accountability and compassion (Christmon as cited in Robinson, 2021; Chandler as cited in Robinson, 2021). The study showed how children of absent fathers are at times expected to accept and follow the boundaries as well as the physical or emotional disengagement of their fathers which oftentimes disregard the multifaceted role of and necessity of fatherhood in a child's life.

Patel and Mavungu (2016) highlighted how the complex social phenomena of father absenteeism take into account both the physical and emotional absence of a father. Madhavan et al. (2016) describe varying paternal connections such as residential connections where a father and child reside in the same household, household connections where a father and child do not reside in the same place but are of the same household, social connections where there is no co-residence but there is an acknowledged relationship and no connection where there is no contact between a child and father whatsoever. Participants specifically reflected on a social connection where they expressed legitimate claims about their biological father but did not live nor have a substantial emotional connection with their fathers. Participants also expressed having minimal connection

with their fathers due to not knowing their whereabouts. The study further showed that participants may know where their fathers reside even going as far as knowing that their absent father is a present caregiver in another household. What was specifically significant within the study was how participants highlighted a lack of reasoning for their biological father's absence as many described how they were not given a definitive reason as to why they were experiencing intentional father absenteeism. This is in alignment with a study done by Stevenson and Black (as cited in Boothroyd & Cross, 2017) as they collated that 69 studies showed that father absence arose due to unspecified reasons.

The absence of reasoning is symbolised in the participants' desire to be heard as the study showed an unanticipated eagerness for their experiences of father absenteeism to be discussed. Participants acknowledged the commonality of father absenteeism amongst black South African families as well as the taboo nature which has halted discourses around this significant lived experience within the black community. This is something which has been acknowledged within research as studies have recognised the lack of discourse around the reasons for father absenteeism and its multifaceted impacts that it has had on South African children which goes beyond the financial and resourceful implications (Mavungu, 2013; Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). Participants' acknowledgement of its commonality mirrors the recognition within academia and media that father absenteeism in South Africa is a noteworthy social issue (Richter et al., 2012; Patel & Mavungu, 2016). Albeit, attempts to tackle this issue through discussions are oftentimes met with alienating measures to blockade and suppress these opportunities to unpack and understand the feelings and viewpoints that arise from their experience of father absenteeism. Their conflictual feelings of alienation and wishes to speak about their experiences manifested as an anxious excitement as well as an enthusiastic anticipation of what is to come from the individual interviews as well as the focus group. Interestingly, the lack of research on men's desires to discuss their experiences with father absenteeism poses an academic opportunity which can be explored further. Moreover, the study showed how young black males have a desire to shed light on their unique experiences which many participants perceive as going unnoticed within the multifaceted discourses and discussions of and around father absenteeism.

The study showed that participants conceptualised a father as someone who is not only physically present, but someone who plays the role of a guidance figure where their words, behaviours, and presence assist in guiding a child in conceptualising a sense of self-identity and locality within their social environments. Studies have shown that a pivotal part of a child's social behaviours, conflict resolution and self-discovery is the sense of emotional security and confidence which is partly fostered within the father-child relationship (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006; Day & Padilla-Walker as cited in Dickerson, 2011). Richter and Morrell (2006) found that father absenteeism has more profound effects on male children where social skills and behaviour, emotional regulation, and the modelling of socially appropriate male behaviours can be significantly influenced by a present paternal figure. This was seen in how participants in the study reflected on how their experience of fatherlessness slowed their social learning experience through the lack of paternal guidance. Participants expressed how the absence of their father mirrored the absence of a tangible conceptualisation of what is fatherhood, who they are, and their positionality in society. The study showed how young black males growing up without their biological fathers experience an unfamiliarity with fatherhood and difficulty expressing what a father is or what it entails due to their overt experience of father absenteeism. Participants grasped onto what they perceived to lack in their experience of father absenteeism, as well as paternal figures they have observed through proximal relationships and media, to conceptualise paternity as being a role which encompasses guidance and support.

The study showed that guidance, protection, and nurturance are aspects which they envision fatherhood upholds. This sentiment speaks to research on father involvement in a South African context where fatherhood has been centred around being a guiding and protective figure in a child's life (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Maurer & Pleck, 2006). Most participants upheld stereotypically masculine and heteronormative aspects of fatherhood and father involvement and did not necessarily reflect on interactions such as feeding, dressing up and leisure or play activities, which studies have shown are as important as the provider-protector role of fatherhood to a child's development (Jain et al. as cited in Dickerson, 2011; Leath, 2017). It was only participants who had lost their fathers through death who were able to reflect on leisure interactions but still abstained from mentioning it when conceptualising what is a father. Interestingly, the data showed that young black males acknowledge that paternal guidance provides an equally pivotal role in

their development where the former provides a firm and male-oriented sense of guidance that is steered by a father's direct past experiences which their sons also go through. It was also evident that participants placed importance on the feature of resourcefulness when conceptualising a father. In direct relation to their experiences, participants reflected on how the lack of a paternal figure brought financial and resourceful difficulties to varying degrees. The sentiments of the participants affirm how being able to provide financially and resourcefully are seen as essential markers of being a father within a South African context (Makusha & Richter, 2014; Maruer & Pleck, 2006). The study showed that young black males perceive the ability to support one's child and family as an important feature when conceptualising what being a father entails.

Similarly to both the absence of a conceptualisation of fatherhood and the ongoing process of making sense of it, the study showed that young black males growing up without their biological fathers demonstrate difficulties conceptualising a concept of self, whilst seeking a better understanding of who they are. While participants were able to grasp tangible aspects of who they are, such as their race and the ongoing development of their masculinity, the study showed that there was a shared difficulty in grasping their positionality in the world. With a significant part of their identity being built upon their experience of father absenteeism and the deprivation that comes with it, participants expressed an internalisation of their absent father. Through his perspective of self-psychology, Kohut conceptualised that a child's needs mirroring in that they are able to experience a caregiver, or self-object, who recognises and affirms their capabilities and emotions whilst allowing the child to emotionally latch onto a caregiver who is experienced as a representation of the child (Swartz, 2013; Wanamaker, 2012). He argued that this is an essential experience for the adaptive development of the self as well as one's esteem and identity (Swartz, 2013; Banai & Shaver, 2005).

Participants in the study reflected on the absence of a positive mirroring self-object as they were only able to experience and internalise the absence of a paternal figure as well as all their perceptions around and their feelings towards the reasons for absence. In part, the lack of a paternal figure contributed to the internalising behaviours where participants experienced withdrawal and anxiety, as well as acting out behaviours which reflected feelings of anger towards their fathers' absence (Rose et al., 2018). The internalisation and projection of their feelings towards this

absence were filtered through their lens and manifested through the projection of their feelings to their surroundings. Projection refers to a process where aspects of oneself or emotions which are harboured by an individual are placed on to others (Lemma, 2003). Amongst children, projection often involves aggressive or disruptive behaviours as seen in the manners in which some participants interacted with their maternal figures and other people in their lives (Rose et al., 2018). Participants also showed internalised behaviours as they reflected on feelings of anxiety, depression, and withdrawal (Rose et al., 2018). Thus, the study showed that many participants acknowledged how their father's absence shaped them as a significant marker of this was the experience of being forced to make sense of life lessons through trial and error without the guidance of a positive paternal figure for them to progress in life.

Albeit, participants reflected on their ongoing search for who they are beyond the aspects of demographic descriptions. The study showed how their identities are largely related to the sense of resiliency they have had to adopt and foster. Moreover, participants touched on how the internalisation of their absent fathers has pushed them to become the men in which they lacked throughout their lives. The study showed how these young black males wish to reshape their lived experiences in relation to their past experiences in such a way that they emulate the features that were not present. Part of this reconceptualisation of who they are is focused on the exploration of themselves as well as the trauma and by-products of father absenteeism. Part of this process is self-discovery is the intake of the opinions of masculinity, manhood, and fatherhood on social media and social interactions. The study showed how discussions on social media around manhood, their positionality within society, and fatherhood are used to better conceptualise themselves. Participants looked at prominent male social figures for guidance.

Amongst the various utilities of media such as leisure and communication, media plays a pivotal role in societal norms and sociohistorical value systems to be interrogated, affirmed and practised in such a way that continues to construct and reconstruct the structures of society (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013; Kivel & Johnson, 2009). Moreover, media provides a platform for varying constructions of societal phenomena such as gender and identity, as well as power relations to be critically and at times biasedly discussed (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013; Nesbitt-Larking, 2022). Amongst the many ways in which participants seek out a better understanding of themselves and

fatherhood is through media consumption, something in which Baker (as cited in Dunlap & Johnson, 2013) and Critcher (as cited in Dunlap & Johnson, 2009) speak to as humans acquire different conceptualisations of identity through what media portrays. Participants affirm the significant amount of academia on the intersectionality of media platforms, gender and identity as there is a desire for them to further foster their concept of self and where they stand within a society which socially constructs varying identities through many spheres including the media consumption which occurs during times of leisure (Castells as cited in Dunlap & Johnson, 2013; Johnson et al., 2008). Socially constructed concepts such as masculinity are absorbed, negotiated and critically discussed through what the participants have seen on television and what they have engaged with over social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and TikTok.

More specifically, participants reflected on the conflictual aspects of social media as well as the benefits of engaging with prominent figures such as Jordan B. Peterson as a guidance figure to better understand their multifaceted identity. With the intake of shifting dialogues around masculinity, manhood, and fatherhood on social media, participants reflected on how this has further complicated their conceptualisations of their self-identity and fatherhood. Johnson (as cited in Johnson et al., 2008) reflected on this challenge when in the correlations between identity and media consumption where media poses issues around contradictory and everchanging constructions of identities. Albeit, young men within the virtual community have found solace within the guidance of prominent social figures such as Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychologist who has gained a significant following over the years for his readily available critical analysis of models of masculinity and gender identity (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022; van de Ven & van Gemert, 2022). Peterson's engagements with manhood and masculinities as well as his controversial defiance to comply with updated human rights legislations centred around evolving gendered identity has centred him as a popular male mental health figure. His teachings found on social media platforms such as YouTube, media appearances, tours, and self-help books have reached millions (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022; Lewis, 2018; Nicholls, 2019). Similarly, participants showed a genuine desire to understand the features of ideal manhood through Peterson's teachings. What was particularly significant was the role which Jordan Peterson played for many participants in the study as they found an idealised paternal figure in him who provided support, nurturance and guidance, features that their absent father lacked (Nesbitt-Larking, 2022; Elis, 2023).

Reflexive Commentary

As the researcher, my role and positionality have played a pivotal part in conducting this research study. As a young black male who grew up with my biological father, my experience influenced the way I engaged with the literature, the moving realities that each participant was able to share and how I interpreted the information. From the onset of the data collection process, I found myself having to challenge my perspective on my sheltered understanding as to how people perceive their experiences of father absenteeism. The overwhelming response from people of different demographics who wished to speak about their experiences pushed me to take a look at why I had thought that not many people would want to share their experience, and pushed my understanding that within the social construction of masculinity and fatherhood is a socially constructed generalisation that men, amongst other identities, do not want to speak. Rather, there appear to be not enough safe platforms and resources to speak which poses further questions as to how one provides a space that can be held therapeutically for people to be comfortable to share their experiences. It was through my own psychotherapy, journaling and research supervision that I discovered how my own experiences of fatherhood and socially constructed gendered identity have influenced every aspect of this research study. Understanding that father absenteeism is not one monolithic experience that has a stereotypical linear pathway, but rather, is more complex than the snapshots that we may see. Furthermore, understanding that the conceptualisations of identity are influenced by various parts of one's life helps to deepen an understanding of who you are at this moment and what brought you here was an experience that I did not get to witness through these brief interactions, but through the privilege of being allowed to hear about their realities which, in turn, influences my own lived experience.

Limitations

Due to time constraints, the study was only able to utilise one focus group of five participants, and 6 individual interviews which totalled 11 respondents all of whom were enrolled at The University of the Witwatersrand. Subsequently, the study cannot be generalised to the whole South African black male population who have experienced father absenteeism. Moreover, due to the sample population being university students, the study cannot necessarily represent a

population of young black South African males who have not attended tertiary education institutions. Albeit, there is the possibility of exploring the varying populations that may not have been represented in this study with further research.

The use of focus groups and individual interviews may also place possible bias or subjectivity when considering their experiences of fatherlessness and may not take into account objective aspects of fatherhood and gendered identity. Focus groups specifically have multifaceted layers where specific aspects may have been underrepresented due to the varying intricacies that focus groups may bring. Time constraints and the agency of participants may halted the possibility of follow-up individual interviews or a follow-up focus group which could have further strengthened the study, someone who may be considered when looking at future research in alignment to father absenteeism, gendered identity and positionality.

Recommendations

A striking aspect of the study was the overwhelming feedback when the research call was sent to the university students. Several emails were received of young black males who met the requirements, but due to time constraints could not be interviewed. Moreover, individuals who did not meet the demographic requirements such as age and gender also reached out to find out whether they may participate in any way. Participants chosen to participate expressed a desire to speak about their experience and shed light on how father absenteeism looked like in their social context. The participants reflected on their challenges of discussing the common experience of father absenteeism in their social environments and the lack of platforms in which the socially crippling experience of father absenteeism in the black South African context. Thus, further studies may be done on how father absenteeism has affected participants who are older than 24 years of age, young black women, and new fathers and how these different groups conceptualise fatherhood as well as their identity and positionality within the South African context.

Furthermore, there could be interest in how father absenteeism and positionality are understood or conceptualised amongst young males or females of other racial demographics. There

has also been a key mention of the importance of social fathers in literature and amongst participants, thus there is a possibility in how young South African men experience and conceptualise their relationships with social fathers or the absence of social fathers within a South African context which places importance on community paternity and ubuntu.

There is also a need for research to be done on the influence of social media figures such as Jordan Peterson, and how they influence young males growing up in a social context where hegemonic masculinity and healthy masculinity are discussed, and the persistence of fatherlessness. There are possible research avenues in which social media figures such as Jordan Peterson, Andrew Tate and other emerging male public figures have become possible substitute paternal figures for a large number of fatherless children in a variety of contexts.

Conclusion

This research paper aimed to explore the experiences of young black male university students who are growing up without their biological fathers within the Southern African Context. Furthermore, there was an interest to find out how these young black males conceptualise fatherhood as well as make sense of their own gendered identity and masculinity. The study found that young black males growing up without their biological fathers experience absence as an intentional decision not to participate in their lives even when there are avenues to do so. There is a common experience that their father's absence did not take into account the possible effects that it may have brought into their lives as the experiences of being forgotten or disregarded in their father's absenteeism were felt. Their experiences of fatherlessness varied from no connection or interaction with their father, to knowing where their fathers reside but having minimal to no interactions with them, to the experience of father absenteeism through death. It was through what they lacked in their fathers' absence as well as their observations of paternal figures in their social environment that the participants conceptualised the role of a father as both an act which involves being physically present, but also a role which involves guidance through words, behaviours, and presence that allows for a child to foster a sense of understanding of who they are and their position in varying parts of society.

Participants of the study reflected on their lived experiences and the challenges they faced which would have been better managed with the guidance of a paternal figure. The study revealed that guidance was accompanied by protection and resourcefulness where allowing one to grow but shielding them from dangers they may encounter is accompanied by being able to financially and resourcefully provide for their families. The absence of such an experience was accompanied by the challenge of self-conceptualisation as the study showed that there is an ongoing, and at times difficult, journey of self-discovery that the participants are experiencing. The study showed that tangible aspects of their identity are labelled, but there is a challenge in discovering their positionality in the world as well as the ongoing development and discovery of what their gendered identity looks like. The lack of a paternal figure that would have possibly allowed for the internalisation and mirroring that a child needs when formulating their inner world is lost in their fatherlessness and makes the journey difficult to navigate. Their feelings of deprivation pan out in varying ways such as acting out behaviours and social withdrawal, while also seeking out paternal figures, ideas of fatherhood or conceptualisations of parts of their identity through social media and male figures in their social environment. A consistent and significant finding of the study is the desire for their experiences to be discussed, heard, and acknowledged as there is a shared sentiment that the taboo nature that such a common experience in South Africa needs more opportunities for a communal interrogation of normalised social pandemic that is father absenteeism.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Information Sheet

The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing Up Without Their Biological Father

Dear Participants,

My name is Tumelo Mogomotsi and I am a Master of Arts student in Clinical Psychology at The University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Yvette Esprey. As part of my Master's degree, I am conducting a research study about the experiences of young black males growing up without their biological fathers and how young black males growing up without their biological fathers conceptualise fatherhood and their own gendered identity. The study is entitled The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing Up Without Their Biological Father.

With father absenteeism disproportionately affecting black communities and subsequently leaving millions of black children living without their biological fathers, coupled with research focusing on the experiences of how and why fathers abandon their families and children, there is a need to understand how the children left behind conceptualise and understand their experiences of growing up without their fathers. Thus, my research aims to provide a platform in which the experiences of young black males growing up without their biological contexts are voiced, acknowledged, and understood. Moreover, I am interested in how young black males growing up without their fathers make sense of fatherhood and their own ever-evolving masculinity and gendered identity.

I am inviting you to take part in a focus group of 6-8 participants or a semi-structured individual interview if you are a young black male aged 19-24 years old has experienced growing up without their biological father. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about between 90-100 minutes for the focus group or 60-90 minute for the individual interview. The focus group and the individual interviews will take place at The Emthonjeni Centre, which is based at The University of the Witwatersrand, on the [TBA upon ethics clearance] at [TBA upon

ethics clearance], or [TBA upon ethics clearance at [TBA upon ethics clearance]. These respective dates and times will be negotiable in relation to each participant's timetable and preferred days and times.

During the focus group and the individual interviews, I will propose prompts which will motivate discussions and encourage members of the focus group to divulge details of their personal experience in relation to their father absenteeism and personal identity. Topics and sub-topics around fatherhood, absent fathers, masculinity, and gendered identity will be explored in a discursive manner.

Due to the use of focus groups, confidentiality can be maintained and anonymity within the group cannot be guaranteed due to personal experiences and views on fatherhood and identity being shared with other members of the focus group. Each participant will be given a pseudonym and will not be referred by their names during the study. While a focus group will be utilised, your contribution will remain anonymous and will only be acknowledged as your own contribution if you request. Moreover, while I may assure you that the confidentiality of the reporting and data analysis, I cannot assure you confidentiality between participants due to the discursive nature of focus groups. Albeit, I will ask participants to respect the discussion the focus group may bring about, and ensure that each participant adheres to the ethical guidelines on focus groups within a group context. With regards to the individual interviews, confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study for secondary analysis, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on. Audio recordings will be transcribed and stored safely in password-protected .zip files in a password-protected laptop. Moreover, data collected through the focus groups will be destroyed 5 years after the research report has been completed.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you wish to volunteer. You do not have to take part and you may stop participating at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not be given any direct benefits if you choose to participate in the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would

normally have should you decide to join the study. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

The focus group and the individual interviews for this research study will be centered around discussing your personal experiences with father absenteeism, fatherhood, identity, gendered identity and your positionality in regards to your masculinity. This may bring about difficult feelings to handle and possible recollections of painful experiences. In the event that this occurs within the research study, counselling services at The Emthonjeni Centre will be made available free of charge. The administrator officer of The Emthonjeni Centre, Paballo Lepota (011 717 4513/ Paballo.Lepota@wits.ac.za), will refer you to the available psychologists/ student psychologist which will be able to provide counselling.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complains about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Tumelo Mogomotsi

Researcher:
Tumelo Mogomotsi, 1851458@students.wits.ac.za, +27 82710 0554
Dr. Yvette Esprey, yvette.esprey@wits.ac.za

Appendix B

Focus Group Consent Form

The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing Up Without Their Biological Father

Researcher: Tumelo Mogomotsi

Supervisor: Dr. Yvette Esprey

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the focus groups may be audio recorded, transcribed, and stored securely by the researcher	YES	NO
I understand that topics may lead to discussions which are tangential but still fall under the scope of Fatherhood and identity	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from focus groups may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in the focus groups (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be	YES	NO

used or passed on, and will be destroyed after 5 years by the researcher (Tumelo Mogomotsi)

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)



…… (signature)

Tumelo Mogomotsi (Researcher)

05/04/2023

Appendix C

Individual Interview Consent Form

The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing Up Without Their Biological Father

Researcher: Tumelo Mogomotsi

Supervisor: Dr. Yvette Esprey

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the individual interview may be audio recorded, transcribed, and stored securely by the researcher	YES	NO
I understand that topics may lead to discussions which are tangential but still fall under the scope of Fatherhood and identity	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from individual interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in the individual interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will	YES	NO

not be used or passed on, and will be destroyed after 5 years by the researcher (Tumelo Mogomotsi)

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)



…… (signature)

Tumelo Mogomotsi (Researcher)

05/05/2023

Appendix D

Interview Schedules

The following questions are the anticipated prompts which will be used to help facilitate an in-depth discussion of and around young, black males experience of growing up without their biological fathers and their understanding of this experience:

The Focus Group Meeting and Individual Interview Prompts:

- What brings you all here today is a shared experience of growing up without a present father, how does it feel to be here today?
- When s say the words 'Father' and 'Fatherhood'; what comes to mind? What does it mean for you?
- How would you define what a 'Father' is?
- What is a good father and what is a bad father? What does this look like to you?
- What is your experience of a father?
- Does your definition of what are father is align with your experience?
- How would you describe your feelings around your father's absence?
- Do you feel your father's absence shaped the type of man you are today?
- What does it mean for you to be able to discuss your experience as black men to complete strangers?
- I'm interested to know what do you believe is your position in the world? How do you see yourself in terms of your identity and gender?

Appendix E



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE PROTOCOL NUMBER:

MClin/23/05

PROJECT TITLE: The Forgotten Child: The Experience of South African Young Black Male University Students Growing Up Without Their Biological Father.

INVESTIGATOR Mogomotsi Tumelo (1851458)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED 16 May 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL Low Risk

EXPIRY DATE 31 December 2025

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 07 June 2023 **CHAIRPERSON** _.

_____ (Dr Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Dr Yvette Esprey (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

_____

Signature **Date** 07/06/2023