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Why Mothers Do Not Tell:

Narratives of Maternal Non-disclosure of Biological Paternal Identity

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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Masters of Arts in Research Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, June 2013

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Declaration

I declare that *Why Mothers Do Not Tell: Narratives of Maternal Non-disclosure of Biological Paternal Identity* is my own unaided work, and all the sources cited have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references. The academic work is submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Research Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Livhuhani Manyatshe

June 2013

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Abstract

Children with absent and *unknown* fathers (also referred to as undisclosed paternal identity) have distinctly been identified as an interest group due to their increased risk to adverse psychological effects specifically associated with not knowing one's biological father. It is taken for granted that these children have the freedom of asking their mothers and female caregivers who their fathers are, not taking into account that often there is a tacit rule within these homes whereby the biological father is never discussed.

The aim of this exploratory study was to use narratives of mothers and guardians who have children under their care who do not know their true fathers' identities, in order to explore the range of probable reasons that contribute to maternal caregivers not disclosing the identity of biological fathers.

Eight face-to-face, individual interviews were conducted with female participants from varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds within the Johannesburg area. The women aged between 33 and 60 years were recruited with the assistance of a non-governmental organisation and from online forums. Interviews were conducted in English or a language that the participants understood and lasted on average an hour. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcribed text. The study was undertaken using an interpretive approach that explored the phenomenon of the participants' lived experience of not disclosing. A gendered analysis provided a distanciated framework to review the findings against current societal arrangements.

Findings indicated that mothers not disclosing could be linked to the *fathers' behaviour* such as inconsistent commitment to the paternal role, denial of paternity and at times, whereabouts were not known limiting what could be conveyed to the children. For this particular study, the *nature of the relationship*, which is often characterised by the instability of the parents' relationship at the time of

the birth, and subsequent separation, seemed to be a risk factor that a child may not be told who their true father is. Gender-based violence was also found to be contributing to the separation between parents and this in turn created an opportunity for the uninvolved fathers to be absent and unknown to the children. The cultural script that silences women's experiences of gender-based violence means that father absence that resulted from the violence was difficult to talk about in the homes. The data also gave insight into the differential experiences among the women when dealing with absent, unknown whereabouts and absconded fathers. Although this study was conducted on an exploratory basis, it is suggested that continuous engagement with this topic through research and public discourse would best define how to address the issue. The findings suggest a need to provide mothers who may be considering disclosure with strategies on how to disclose. There is also a broader need to address structural issues that may be contributing towards the phenomenon such as men's violence towards their families.

Keywords: unknown father, biological father, maternal non-disclosure, interpretive approach, gendered analysis

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1

Chapter 1: Introduction

Children with absent and unknown fathers have been identified as an interest group due to their increased risk of adverse psychological effects associated with not knowing one's biological father (Jadva, Badger, Morrissette, & Golombok, 2009; Terwogt, Terwogt-Reijnders, & van Hekken, 2002). Emerging research conducted within the Eastern Cape area in South Africa has linked undisclosed paternal identity (undisclosed paternal identity is used throughout this research to imply undisclosed *biological* paternity) to psychological distress among the youth (Nduna & Jewkes, 2011). Furthermore, studies have found that there is a tacit rule of silence whereby amidst the desire to know the identities of their biological fathers the affected individuals were uneasy about approaching their mothers and caregivers to enquire about their fathers' identities (Nduna, under review; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011; Nduna & Sikweyiya, submitted). A similar pattern of silence was noted in a masculinities study, where some adult men who had killed their intimate partners, and did not know their biological fathers, narrated about how their mothers did not discuss their biological fathers and how they also did not feel at liberty to ask (Mathews, Jewkes, & Abrahams, 2011). In some studies affected children blamed the mother and viewed her as deliberately concealing his identity (Phaswana, 2003). The mistrust that can arise from these circumstances and the likelihood that it augments detrimental familial interactions, is undeniable.

In South Africa, an unwed mother is not obliged by law to disclose who the father of her child is on official birth records (Department of Home Affairs, 2010; C. Kelly, 2012). This severs an external historical record that could provide children with the information about their birth

fathers in the instances where the mother is not forthcoming with the information. The issue of maternal non-disclosure of biological fathers' identities has psychosocial and legal implications for the individuals involved, and consequently, it has implications for policy implementation. The inadequate literature documenting the numbers of individuals who are not being told who their true fathers are and what the probable reasons are, makes it imperative to conduct a study that will contribute towards our understanding about the dynamics involved in this phenomenon.

1.1 Rationale

An extensive body of literature exists on absent fathers (Datta, 2007; Langa, 2010; Mkhize, 2004; Morrell & Richter, 2006; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). These studies have tended to focus on the psychosocial consequences of absent fathers on the children, and explored the concept of fatherhood in order to try to formulate approaches to advance father involvement in the children's lives. Children with absent and unknown fathers have repeatedly been mentioned in literature (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Langa, 2010; Madhavan, Townsend, & Garey, 2008); however, there is a dearth of investigations into the dynamics of the occurrence (undisclosed paternal identity will also be interchangeably used with maternal non-disclosure)

The phenomenon is mentioned in Dennis and Ntsimane's (2006) study on absent fathers in narratives of AIDS, but no further attention is paid to it as if to suggest that it is a minor inconvenience for the women and the affected children. Some studies have alluded to cultural factors as mitigating maternal non-disclosure, for example, when a man has impregnated an unwed mother, and he does not pay cultural dues (*intlawulo)* for the deed, he is unlikely to be

disclosed as the father of the child (Nduna, under review; Nduna, Kasese-Hara, Ndebele, & Pillay, 2011).

It is also said that if the father does not contribute financially towards the upbringing of the child, that the mother interpreted that as the alleged father absconding from taking responsibility for the pregnancy, and hence he could not be identified and disclosed to the child (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006). Should the mother subsequently die without leaving any information about the father's identity, the remaining grandparents and caregivers would not know what to say to the child (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Langa, 2010).

International literature on misattribution of paternity (when the wrong man is identified as the biological father) report on the negative societal perceptions about women who concealed the true fathers' identities. The women were vilified, and it was assumed that the non-disclosure was a self-serving deception (Gilding, 2005). Without further understanding the contexts in which mothers choose not to disclose, it is easy to perpetuate the "mother-blame" pattern where the fault is perceived to lie with the women, while failing to explore the societal conditions that may be contributing to the phenomenon (Garey & Arendell, 2001).

Aside from a study conducted by Nduna (under review) in a low socio-economic context of Alexandra Township, there is limited literature available to facilitate an understanding of the women's silence from their viewpoint and the dynamics of maternal non-disclosure. This study attempts to address that research gap by conducting a qualitative exploratory study with mothers and guardians who have not disclosed the fathers' identities of the children under their care, as well as explore the psychosocial impact experienced by the mothers. The dearth of scientific discourse around this area provides the impetus to conduct this research. By conducting this

research and bringing to the fore a previously ignored issue, it is hoped that it will spark an empathetic engagement with women and children dealing with absent, unknown and undisclosed fathers and encourage scientific and public debates about how undisclosed biological paternity and maternal non-disclosure can be addressed within the South African sphere.

1.2 Study Aims and Objectives

The study aims to use narratives of mothers and guardians who have children who do not know their true fathers under their care in order to explore probable reasons that influence mothers' and guardians' non-disclosure of the biological fathers' identities to those children.

The research had the following objectives:

1. To understand what mothers (and guardians) who had not disclosed viewed as factors contributing to their non-disclosure of biological paternity.
2. To explore and describe any influences from cultural and socioeconomic contexts in maternal caregivers' responses about undisclosed biological paternal identity.
3. To explore the dynamics of the mother-child relationship within the context of an undisclosed biological father.

To meet the aim and objectives of this study, semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with mothers and guardians who have not disclosed the fathers' identities of the children under their care. The varied contexts from which the participants were recruited provided a valuable backdrop to understand the influence of culture and social positioning in the women's experiences. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis to arrive at an understanding about the phenomenon. In order to locate the findings against the broader societal

context a gendered analysis was applied to bring awareness of the context within which women's decisions are embedded.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the aims and objectives of the study, the research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What factors did mothers (and guardians) perceive as contributing to their non-disclosure of biological paternity?
2. What influences, if any, do socioeconomic and cultural contexts have in maternal caregivers' responses about undisclosed biological paternal identity?
3. What are the mother-child dynamics within the context of an undisclosed biological father?

2

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will focus on providing a background on the constructs used in this study, and clarify what is already understood about maternal non-disclosure of biological paternal identity from existing literature. The introduction provides some of the arguments advocating for children to have access to their biological heritage. It is followed by the section elucidating the occurrence of the phenomenon in the South African context. The chapter will conclude with a gender analysis framework that will be used to ground the findings of this study.

2.1 Introduction: The right to know biological parentage

Budding research in South Africa has reported on the adverse psychological impact experienced by youth who do not know their biological fathers' identities. A study conducted in the Eastern Cape by Nduna and Jewkes (2011) reported on the negative effect felt by the affected youth which included anxiety, insecurity, perceptions of marginalisation by family members, and feeling abandoned by the absent father. However, amidst the experienced negative effect, some research reports that affected children still explicitly expressed a desire to know the man (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Langa, 2010; Nduna & Jewkes, 2012b; Phaswana, 2003; Terwogt et al., 2002).

Morrell (2006) has articulated that the desire to know one's father is present in most children who have lost links with their fathers through other means besides maternal non-disclosure. Internationally, adoption studies, and studies about individuals conceived through artificial

insemination have also pointed out the probable psychological duress due to not knowing one's biological father and other blood relatives (Beeson, Jennings, & Kramer, 2011; Jadva et al., 2009). In Western contexts this has stemmed a movement advocating the vital interest for the children conceived in those situations to have access to information regarding their genetic heritage in terms of who their parents (both maternal and paternal) are (Besson, 2007).

In view of maternal non-disclosure and the manifold circumstances it could manifest in, the international based arguments would be that the child should have the right to know the biological father's identity in instances of artificial insemination where the gamete (sperm) has been anonymously donated (Besson, 2007). Although not exhaustive, other scenarios would include cases of female same-sex parenting or lone parenting where father involvement has been deliberately excluded and adoption cases where the mother is unlikely to know the father (Bellis, Hughes, Hughes, & Ashton, 2005).

In South Africa, artificial insemination, surrogacy and adoption are legislated by the Human Tissue Act 65 of 1983 (South African Law Commission, 2001) thus it can be presumed that the above cases do occur in South Africa, although we do not know at what scale, as little research attention has been paid to the life trajectories or experiences of these families. Furthermore, in South Africa, the donors' identities are completely protected and deemed anonymous; as a result a child born from those circumstances would not be able to know who the father (or mother) is (South African Law Commission, 2001). The movement for children to have access in knowing their true fathers (and mothers) is based on the 1989 international agreement, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by South Africa (Burman, 2003). It could be said the country is still in its infancy compared to international progress in advocating

for the rights of children to know their heritage parents, particularly in terms of the father for children born in non-marital contexts.

For identity theorists, it is deemed vital for each child to know their genetic heritage in order to develop a stable psyche (Terwogt et al., 2002). Children's rights advocates raise the concern regarding inheritance rights for those children whose legal status is not recognised and it is argued that it leaves them and future generations disenfranchised (Besson, 2007). There are similar arguments in South Africa, where the patrilineal kin is held in high esteem, that those children have to source their paternal support from social father figures, and their inheritance rights are not secured (Hughes, 1992; Madhavan et al., 2008; Morrell, 2006). In countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom, the increase in medical genetic testing means that the individuals now have a subsidiary interest in knowing their medical history through knowing their genetic parents (Bellis et al., 2005; Besson, 2007).

The convention goes further to articulate the child's right to parental care, and this has been pivotal in highlighting the responsibilities of both women and men as parents (Burman, 2003; Datta, 2007). While there are various family formations, some women may elect to be mothers without the biological fathers' involvement (Jadva et al., 2009). Authors like Alvare (2011) argue that women electing to be lone parents are an exception rather than the norm, and this assertion can be applied to the South African context (Chidester, 1992). The linking of paternal presence to children's positive developmental outcome has undeniably sparked a research interest into absent fathers and the advocating of paternal presence in children's lives both locally and internationally, (Alvare, 2011; Morrell, 2006; Morrell & Richter, 2006; Richter, 2006).

2.1.1 Gendered ideology around parenting

The cultural assumption, designating child-rearing as a women's domain is attributed as having created a considerable space for men to forsake their paternal obligations, financial and otherwise (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006). Arguments advocating for paternal presence have cited that economic conditions are not conducive to child-rearing within the context of a 'single-female income' household. More so when women are often left with the major burden of child-rearing responsibilities, and with no further reasonable support (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999) and when women have a lower earning power, and the implication of parental care requires a prolonged financial commitment towards raising children (Burman, 2003; SAIRR, 2012). In that context authors such as Kaebnick (2004) assert that it can reasonably be expected that adults who knowingly contribute towards bringing the child into the world should be held equally responsible.

South Africa is reported as having more maternal orphans who are not looked after by their biological fathers compared to the rest of southern Africa (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; O'Brien, 2011). Where the biological father is undisclosed and the mothers pass away, the children are left under the care of grandmothers, aunts and at times non-blood relatives. The limited finances within these single-female households and the absence of paternal support will often result in these families relying on government subsidies (Lemke, 2003; Makiwane, Makoae, Botsis, & Vawda, 2012; Roby, 2011; Sylvester, 2010). Some literature reports that the harsh living conditions can augment the widely held perception that the presence of the father would have provided better living conditions to the family (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings, 2010; Makiwane et al., 2012; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011; Phaswana, 2003). Hegemonic

constructions of parenting roles that constraints fathers as the financial providers can hinder men's involvement with their children (Kaufman, Wet, & Stadler, 2000; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). It is appreciated that some men do want to be part of their children's lives (Engle, Beardshaw, & Loftin, 2006) and can contribute to their lives in other meaningful ways. However, such gendered ideologies limit men as much as they oppress women.

The changing landscape in terms of rising unemployment and social inequality has affected both men and women (Hunter, 2006) in different ways as sexes and across the races. The increase in children born outside the confines of marriage requires a reconstruction of gender ideology around parenting (Morrell, 2006). It could be said that the dominant ideology has designated that women not only bear children but also shoulder the primary responsibility of raising children (Datta, 2007). Some authors have argued that child-rearing should be considered men's issues too as the men's adjustments and involvement (or non-involvement) as a co-parent also has an effect on the women (Nduna & Jewkes, 2012a) and their role as mothers. Consequently, it has an effect on the well-being of the child(ren) themselves (Worell, 1986). Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) underscore that the change in cultural gender ideology would be useful in maintaining paternal involvement for all men who are fathers, as the cultural norm would expect fathers to be involved with their children irrespective of the current relationship status with the mother. This change in culturally accepted norms around parenting roles would be useful for the achievement of gender equality both within the productive and reproductive spheres (Datta, 2007).

2.2 Context of Undisclosed Father Identity

The legal socio-political and historical context of Apartheid governance is often attributed as having contributed to absent, living fathers (Burman & Van der Spuy, 1996; Makiwane et al., 2012). African men left their families in the rural homestead to go to urban areas for employment purposes, and various legislation prohibited families from joining the men in their urban place of work. This led to the absence of men in rural households and the child-rearing burden and running of the home fell upon the women and elderly extended family members (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Despite progressive changes this practise of leaving one's family in the rural areas is ingrained and still continues (Makiwane et al., 2012).

Even with the repeal of Apartheid laws and dispensation of a democratic system, a higher ratio of African children are reported to have absent and living fathers, even though the phenomenon occurs across all race groups. A South African Institute of Race Relations' report stated that African children under the age of 15 years were the largest group of children with absent and living fathers in 2009 (52% of children), and the overall rate for all race groups was given as 42% of children having an absent and living father (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). The increase in absent and living fathers can be explained by various factors such as migration for employment opportunities by both men and women, decrease in marital rates and formation of new habitation patterns, and related to that an increase in non-marital births (Makiwane et al., 2012).

Children who *do not know* [italic emphasis placed to highlight specifically not knowing as opposed to an absent father] their father's identities have been documented in studies focused broadly on absent fathers and masculinities studies (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Langa, 2010; Madhavan et al., 2008; Mathews et al., 2011). Nduna and colleagues conducted a study in an

attempt to quantify the prevalence of the issue, and it was found that about 30% of children may be affected (Nduna et al., 2011). The current understanding of the phenomena was termed 'undisclosed paternal identity' referring specifically to a biological father who is absent and unknown to the child (Nduna & Jewkes, 2011, 2012b; Nduna et al., 2011).

2.2.1 Effect of undisclosed paternal identity

Qualitative studies conducted on the issue of absent and unknown biological fathers have reported that affected adolescents and youth were apprehensive about asking the mothers and caregivers about their fathers (Langa, 2010; Mathews et al., 2011; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011; Phaswana, 2003). In a Terwogt and colleagues' paper about individuals presenting themselves for therapy due to not knowing their biological fathers, the authors argue that the child's expressed interest in their biological parents can be interpreted by both the parents and child as an assault on the familial allegiance, thus children often suppress their desire to ask their caregivers about their true fathers (Terwogt et al., 2002). In Phaswana's (2003) study conducted in Limpopo Province, the children reported being ashamed of the mother who got 'pregnant out-of-wedlock' and viewed the mothers as deliberately concealing the identities of their fathers.

There is a consensus among authors that the non-disclosure can result in negative dynamics within the family (Nduna & Jewkes, 2011; Phaswana, 2003; Ramphele & Richter, 2006; Terwogt et al., 2002). Ramphele and Richter (2006) further stated that the mistrust between parent and child can further be exacerbated if the unknown parent's identity is revealed by an indirect source. International studies on the misattribution of paternity (when the wrong man is identified as the father) have indicated that in a marital context, a child may grow up falsely believing that the mother's spouse is their biological father (Bellis et al., 2005). This

consequently has an effect on men as social and biological fathers (Turney, 2006). A paper by Bellis and colleagues expressed concerns about the public health consequences that can emanate from concealed genetic heritage and gave illustrations of physical violence by the men against the women or abuse in retaliation against the child (Bellis et al., 2005). Other authors have reported the occurrence of suicide attempts and incest due to undisclosed paternal identity (Nduna & Jewkes, 2011).

The intimate setting of the mother-child dyad can add further expectations that the mother's goodwill will have her disclose to her child who the true father is (Besson, 2007); However, this assumption does not consider broader structural factors that may influence the phenomenon and hinder the women from disclosing (Smart, 2009). Silverstein & Auerbach (1999) stated that maintaining the sacred status of the mother-child dyad perpetuated the cultural assumption of gendered spheres within society that deemed dilemmas concerning women and children as belonging to the private sphere. This typically resulted in women being held responsible for problems that may have their basis in social conditions (Gerson, 2004).

2.2.2 The role of social institutions and disclosure of the rightful biological father

Quantitative studies on paternal involvement have reported the mother's role as imperative in mediating the father-child relationship (Carlson & McLanahan, 2009; Madhavan, Gross, Norris, Richter, & Hosegood, 2012). Kiernan (2006) has suggested that unmarried men who remain on amicable terms with the mothers or are named on the birth certificates, are likely to remain involved in the child's life, and presumably be disclosed to the child. The quantitative nature of these studies often neglected the contextual factors affecting the mother (Sano, Richards, &

Zvonkovic, 2008). Traditional maternal gate-keeping theories are further limited as they tend to focus on divorced couples and couples who were previously in long-term relationships (Alvare, 2011). These studies often did not take into account that liberal approaches to partnering do not secure that all conceptions will happen in such normatively defined circumstances, and that there could also be other contributing factors besides the mother's attitudes and beliefs about father involvement.

Various studies in South Africa reported that men denying paternity or deserting their children have become a common occurrence in (Datta, 2007; Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Mbatha, 2012; Mkhwanazi, 2009; Morrell & Richter, 2006; Nduna & Jewkes, 2012a). This may prove to be a complexity for the unwed women in South Africa, as for the father to be documented on official birth records, he must acknowledge paternity. With no alternative recourse or initiatives to establish paternity, when paternity is disputed the onus is "solely" on the mother to ensure that the father is documented (Department of Home Affairs, 2010) or to take measures to prove that he is the father.

In civil and customary unions, the marital assumptions secure that the woman's current spouse is documented as the father (Clark & van Heerden, 1992; South African Law Commission, 2001) even though the documented man may not be the actual biological father (C. Kelly, 2012). This can be interpreted as an idealisation of the heterosexual marriage and protection of children born in matrimonial contexts (Luxton, 2002) and a disregard towards children conceived in other family structures (Makiwane et al., 2012; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). It is acknowledged that the establishment of a genetic relationship does not necessarily equate that a man will take on his

fatherly role (Datta, 2007; Richter, Chikovore, & Makusha, 2010), and correspondingly a man can take on the paternal role to children who are not biologically his own (Langa, 2010; Morrell, 2006). However, initiatives to establish paternity could diminish the space between biological and legal ties for children (Besson, 2007), and the change in legislation may shift accepted norms and lessen the social distance between fathers and their children.

Structural hindrances such as the State's non-intervention on facilitating the establishment of paternity at birth for children born outside of marriage can also be seen as propagating the acceptance of a culture of "fatherless" children in South Africa (Nduna & Jewkes, 2012a). In her analysis of the child's right to know their heritage, Besson (2007) inferred that non-state intervention can be interpreted as an infringement on the child's right to, at a later stage, have access to their heritage through birth records. The author argued that as the State has the resources to register a child's identity, they would similarly have resources to institute permissible sanctions against those who breached that obligation (Besson, 2007).

Shefer (2004) has highlighted the role of cultural constructions in contributing to the reproduction of uneven gender practises. The customary practises of establishing paternity through the man's family paying fiscal dues to the unwed mother's family leaves minimal option for the women when men do not adhere to this symbolic act (Kaufman et al., 2000; Madhavan et al., 2008; Richter et al., 2010). Munalula (2009) asserts that such cultural arrangements transfer control of the women's fertility over to the men and weakens the women's status. The esteem which these cultural acts signify in some circles have been reported as resulting in mothers and guardians unable to disclose to the child who their father is (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006), and also

at times this caused estrangement between the paternal and maternal family consequently alienating the children from their fathers (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). It is hard to discern how much of a factor this is toward paternal non-disclosure, as selective acculturation among African people means that some may still subscribe to the customary practises of recognising paternity through, *inhlawulo*, and others have been reported as shifted towards a combination of traditional African and Western norms (Burman, 2003).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The epistemological assumptions of this study are broadly set within the constructionism framework which argues that a critical stance needs to be observed against views about the world that are taken for granted. As an epistemology, constructionism is embodied in many theoretical perspectives and provides the philosophical grounding for the knowledge generated (Crotty, 1998). Gergen (1985) states that constructionism is concerned with socially, culturally, and historically situated description or constructions of the world, which are sustained through social actions and language. At times, these actions are privileged at the expense of excluding others, and constructionism fosters a critical stance against such modes of knowledge generation.

2.3.1 Feminist theory

The feminist movement is vast in orientation and there is no singular prescription of what the feminist theory constitutes. It is however stated that within the feminism there is a high degree of consensus that the distinct underlying principle is the awareness of gender and the politics of gender within society (Brayton, 1997). The essential aim of feminist theory as described by Flax (1987) is to analyse gender relations, how they are structured and experienced and more

importantly how they are viewed. It highlights the constructed nature of gender (Sarantakos, 2004), and that while culturally agreed on biological characteristics might assign males and females to the category of men or women, it is not synonymous with gender (Burr, 1998). The notion of gender encompasses socially constructed roles, responsibilities, identities and expectations assigned differently to men and women (Johnson, 1988) and gender is seen as a significant feature of social interactions (Okin, 1989). Authors Stewart and McDermott (2004) state that the notion of gender can be used as an analytic tool to scrutinise phenomena at the societal level. This value is shared by sociologist, Millen (1997), who advocates for all research to take into consideration an unequal society and disproportionate gender relations in order to ensure that androcentric norms are not incorporated into their findings.

It can be said that the gendered role of mothering would affect how mothers relate to their children (Datta, 2007), and to that effect, what and how mothers relate and communicate with their children. A gender analysis would thus seek to see gender hierarchies as entangled in social systems, and that other societal classification systems such as socioeconomic positioning, cultural practises and race are also embedded in societal structures (Lorber, 2000). It is added that the intersectional nature of societal structural arrangements ranks individuals and groups into systems of “power and powerlessness, privilege and disadvantage, normality and otherness."; and these structures are in turn sustained and constructed in everyday interactions and in cultural norms as well as being further legitimised in social institutions and legislation (Lorber, 2000).

By bringing forth a gender structure framework a more realistic description of the lives of women, men and children can be provided by moving beyond stereotypical constructions of

people's lives (Gerson, 2004). According to Lay and Daley (2008), by viewing individuals in their social, political, economic, ethnic, and cultural contexts, these factors and how they overlap to produce the potential for disparities that are rooted in gendered relationships can be observed. A gendered framework would acknowledge the link between individuals' private choices and broader institutions and how at times women's choices are constrained by structural domains of which they have limited control over. Even though maternal non-disclosure is experienced in an intimate setting, gender inequalities are embedded in work and family institutions and shape both personal and social problems, thus a gender lens directs attention to the societal structural arrangement that organises women and men's options differently and the unequal ways that perpetuate inequality (Gerson, 2004).

2.3.2 Locating the study within available literature

Justification for conducting this research was based on that most of the available studies that could be used to infer about fathers unknown to their children had been conducted in the global western context, and they were not directly addressing the phenomenon. Australian studies had largely focused on paternity issues, women not disclosing to their partners and disputed pregnancies in the context of long-term cohabiting partnerships (Turney, 2005, 2011). Aside from Nduna (under review), there had been no other study to explore the dynamics behind mothers not telling their children who their fathers are in the South African context. Investigations have alluded to socially undesirable circumstances such as rape or an affair with a married man as contributing to non-disclosure (Nduna, under review; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011, 2012b; Turney, 2005). International based studies also focused on single mothers by choice, indicating that some affluent women may opt to be mothers without father involvement (Jadva et al., 2009).

The dearth of available literature on why mothers do not disclose, specifically to their children, means that conducting a systematic study would provide a platform for women to voice their own experience on why they do not disclose, without imposing assumptions. The following chapter will elucidate how the application of a phenomenological approach privileged the collection of data from the women's perspective. A gendered analysis as guided by the feminist tenet of gendered ideology would provide a broader interpretive framework to understand the cultural beliefs, norms, and social institutions that the women's decisions are embedded in.

Chapter 3: Method

3

> *"The difference between research and non-research activity is in the way we find answers: the process must meet certain requirements to be called research."*(Kumar, 2005, p. 7)

The notion encapsulated in Kumar's quote is that for a study to qualify as a research study, it has to be undertaken within a framework of a set of philosophies and use procedures that are applicable to answering the posed questions (Kumar, 2005). A diagrammatic representation of the theoretical approaches and assumptions used to investigate the research question can be found in figure 1**.** This chapter will focus on clarifying the underlying theoretical principles of the research processes employed for this study and justify how the selected methodology and data analysis matched the desired outcome of understanding why women may not disclose to the children under their care.

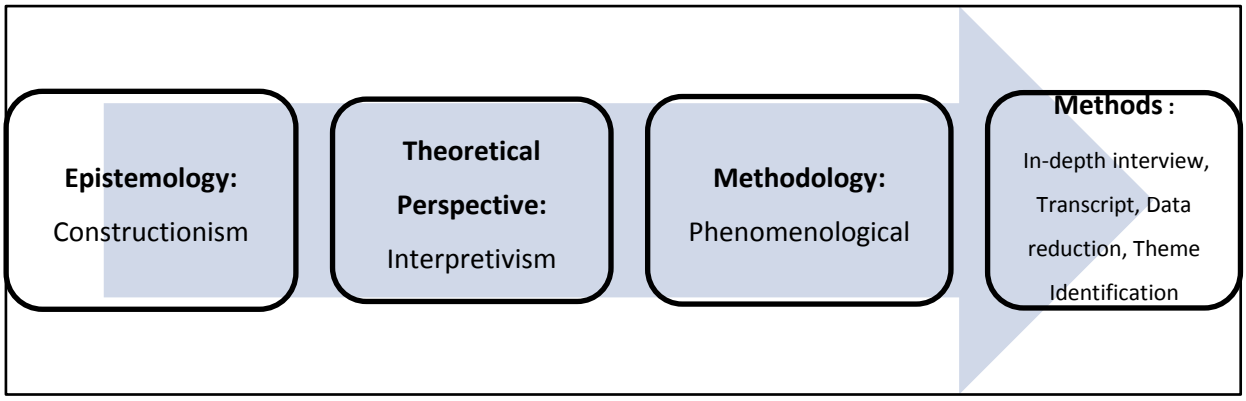


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the study's theoretical foundation

3.1 Choosing a Qualitative Approach

In addressing the aims, objectives and research questions of the study, an exploratory qualitative approach was chosen as there was no previous literature that could be traced, aside from Nduna's (under review) work, to guide the examination of the phenomenon within a South African context. A qualitative approach was appropriate as mothers and guardians that have not told their children who their biological fathers are, could be interviewed and provide information through their personal stories, which are informed by their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Gray (2004) suggests that a qualitative paradigm is particularly beneficial for an exploratory study where there is insufficient available information on the phenomenon being investigated. The qualitative study further enables the investigation of the phenomena in its natural settings, attempting to make sense of the phenomena in terms of the meaning which the people attach to their experiences (Mottier, 2005).

3.1.1 Methodological Framework

The overarching theoretical perspective informing this study is the interpretive paradigm. According to Berger and Luckman (1967, cited in Rowlands, 2005) the philosophical stance in the interpretive paradigm is based on the view that people construct their own realities socially and symbolically. As embedded in its epistemology, research within this paradigm discards the 'objective' or 'factual' account of events and situations, in favour of a shared reality between the researcher and the participants in understanding the phenomena (Crotty, 1998).

The interpretive paradigm provides a more human-centred way of generating knowledge about factors contributing to maternal non-disclosure by making meaning of the subjective data as provided by the life experiences of the mothers and guardians in the face of undisclosed paternal identity and maternal non-disclosure. In Denzin (1989), he advocated

the interpretive approach as the link between the broader social context and the individual's description of their personal experience. A qualitative approach permits an interaction with the mothers and considers their subjective experiences as legitimate. The interpretive approach is so deemed as it relies on "interpretation and understanding" of the subjective experience by those conducting the research (Denzin, 1989, p. 11). Both the roles of the researcher, as an integral part of the research process, and the participants, who provide the data, is acknowledged. The researcher is instrumental in eliciting data through interviews and co-constructing the knowledge through the questions they bring to the research process (Mottier, 2005) and their interpretation which is innate in the data analysis process (Langdridge, 2007). As Lydall, Pretorius, and Stuart (2005) put it, when text is approached by someone seeking to interpret it; the interpreter's own experiential life/world unavoidably intrude through their expectations, beliefs, values and concepts.

In earlier stages of conceptualising the research, it had been decided that the data would be collected using interviews and narratives of mothers who have not disclosed the biological fathers' identities to their children. Locating the research within an interpretive approach was appropriate as the perspective permits for the inquiry to make "sense of feelings, experiences and phenomena as they occur in the real world" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p. 127). Using a phenomenological perspective as prescribed within the interpretive perspective we can understand the women's experience in context. The narratives constructed by the women would allow them to bring sense to their experience and may also be useful in revealing varying meanings and reasons for their actions (Kiguwa, 2006). The researcher has to bring an empathic understanding to the research process (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999) in order to interpret the firsthand account and arrive at an "understanding of the meaning and essence" of maternal non-disclosure for the participants as provided or articulated by the women (Langdridge, 2007, p. 17).

3.1.2 Multiplicity approach

As research approaches Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) consider constructionism and interpretive approaches as divergent at the epistemological and methodological level, even though they may seem identical through their view which assumes that the world is understood through constructed meaning. The distinction is understood to be that interpretive approaches privilege the subjective experience, and the constructionism takes a critical stance of the broader societal context, deeming language as a vehicle that constructs meaning (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). It is argued that language constrains what we are able to perceive and experience, and constructionism is concerned with interpreting the broader systems of meaning and practises that construct reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In K. Kelly (1999), these approaches are placed on a continuum whereby interpretive approaches provides an empathetic insider perspective of the phenomenon and the constructionism provides an outsider perspective. He explains that while the contextually derived account provides material about the subjective experience, they are limited in understanding the phenomena across time and situation. To understand more, "distanciation" is required using a theoretically led interpretation of the phenomenon. This study attempted to negotiate the variance between these approaches by locating the study within this continuum, using phenomenology to privilege the women's firsthand account, and constructionism to locate their experiences within a broader context; balancing the tension between insider and outsider perspectives.

3.1.2.1 Locating the researcher in the research process

Interpretive research accounts for the pre-understanding which the researcher brings to the research process, such as the researcher having been aware of the harsh criticism against women who did not tell their children who their fathers are. The views encountered ranged from "she does not know" or "she had an affair with a married man thus cannot disclose." In

the researcher's perspective, although these situations do arise in real life, these responses reflected a general view of women in these situations as having no sense of personal agency. The literature engaged did not seem to empower the voice of women or at the very least acknowledge their existence contrasted against the widely available literature on absent fathers and impact on the affected children. Not knowing the type of women who would be willing to participate in this study or their circumstances , the researcher decided that a feminist lens was necessary to provide an ethical buffer to the findings, and not reproduce knowledge which may contribute to further oppressing women. This was more pertinent as the research is in the context of women's experience while mothering and more so when the major burden of child rearing is left upon women, with minimal societal judgment placed on men who abscond their paternal obligations.

Locating the interpretive framework within feminist principles, the ultimate goal in this study would be to describe and interpret the mothers and guardians' lived experience of not disclosing - at a personal level as provided by the women's accounts - as well as to locate the findings within the broader societal sphere. By including a feminist lens the findings could be critiqued within a larger social and historical context of gender, race and other social hierarchies (Langellier, 1994). This approach does not discount the phenomenon as provided by the women's accounts during the interview, but it rather addresses the concern of taking the broader societal sphere into consideration when interpreting the findings. Nelson (1989) states that in describing and interpreting both the personal and the political, these are not different kinds of experiences but that "the experience is of different levels of consciousness" (p. 227/65 cited in Langellier, 1994). It was in that empathetic spirit that the exploration of maternal non-disclosure was undertaken using an interpretive research framework.

3.2 Study Participants

As the study had intended to garner the salient feature(s) about the phenomenon across various cultural and social positioning of the mothers, four sites from the Johannesburg Metropolis were initially identified for the recruitment of participants. These sites were selected because they differed in their socioeconomic constituency. Florida and Mondeor, due to the multi-racial residency, would enable recruitment of participants from varying cultural backgrounds and a middle-class social positioning. However, due to the limited response rates in those sites, participants were eventually recruited from the broader Johannesburg area.

A critical ethical precondition to recruiting participants for any study is that they have to be willing to participate and to talk about their experience. The recommended sample size ranges from five or six participants (Langdridge, 2007); while Polkinghorne (1989 cited in Creswell, 2006) recommends five to twenty five individuals. The target number for this study was to recruit six to ten participants who share the same experience of maternal non-disclosure of biological fathers' identities. There had been an intention to obtain participants from various cultural and socioeconomic contexts, in order to understand more about varying or possibly common factors that influence mothers' non-disclosure, and whether the participants' positioning within a socioeconomic or cultural context had any influence at all.
Purposive sampling was suitable, as the sample population had been defined. The inclusion criteria were that (i) the woman was either a mother or a guardian, (ii) the child or children under their care did not know their biological fathers and (iii) the mother or guardian had not told their child who the biological father is. These criteria were put in place, as these particular participants were deemed to have a valuable contribution through their lived experience of the topic under study.

Mothers and guardians are located ubiquitously in society but due to the phenomenological "idiosyncrasy" or rather particularity of the type of mother key to this study, snowball sampling had to be used. Initial contact was made at a place where mothers could be found (such as schools), and those mothers could assist in referring and recruiting more mothers who met the criteria for this study. According to Trochim, (2006) snowball sampling is an efficient and useful method to locate marginalised populations who are not readily accessible. The technique allows a referral network to develop and thus permit for the possibility of including more participants meeting the sample criteria. A shortcoming of this technique is that its success is dependent on the initial contacts and connections made, as well as the ability to keep the information flow going.

3.2.1 Recruiting Participants

The researcher telephonically contacted Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), nursery, primary, and high schools in the Diepkloof, Florida, Mondeor, Naturena and Freedom Park area to request their assistance in facilitating the purposive snowball sampling of the participants. These specific sites were selected due to the researcher having established contacts who could assist in gaining entry. Other factors were that the researcher was familiar with the areas and their geographical location, which permitted ease of travel. The heads of the schools and NGOs were briefed over the phone about the study and were informed that an information sheet[1] would be emailed to them. The schools placed an advertisement[2] in their newsletters inviting mothers and guardians to be volunteers in the study, and for interested mothers to contact the researcher through email or to send a text message to a mobile number. This strategy was agreed upon with one of the schools as they were not in agreement

[1] Appendix1: Information sheet

[2] Appendix2: Advertisement

with forwarding the "touchy" information sheets about the study to the mothers. The strategies employed in this study differed from Nduna (under review) as the participants for that study were identified through a survey conducted for needs assessment purposes for the area.

Florida

Roodepoort is an ethnically heterogeneous district, which encompasses the suburb of Florida. Chipkin's (2012) report states that even though the affluence level varies, the residents within the area can overall be classified as middle class. In this district, an NGO that helps with skills development for single women had initially agreed to assist with the recruitment process. After the head of the NGO discussed the recruitment with the women involved, the organisation was unable to further assist as the women deemed being involved in the study would result in adverse (legal) consequences for them. The researcher altered the recruitment process in response to the unease and loss of potential recruits in the Florida area, and the study was then advertised on online forums to enable more participants to come forward. An identical snippet used in the school newsletters was used in the online advertisements, and an email address was created solely for corresponding with prospective participants.

Diepkloof

Mafukidze and Hoosen (2009) report that determining the affluence level in Diepkloof is not easy as the area is divided into several zones, with some zones housing predominantly informal settlements, and some zones exclusively housing the African middle-class segment. Another study reports that households in this area are deemed to be generally poor, and unemployment rates are very high (Strassburg, Meny-Gibert, & Russell, 2010). A contact person who had initially been identified as a gatekeeper who could assist with accessing entry in the community changed employment and thus could not be of further use. Other strategies to gain access into this community were not successful and due to the time constraint and

limited resources in terms of work force on the ground to recruit participants, this site was abandoned.

Mondeor

In a study about social interaction between races conducted in the racially diverse suburb south of Johannesburg, all twenty participants interviewed categorised Mondeor as a middle-class community (Jewan, 2009). Upon initially contacting one of the assisting nursery schools in this area, the headmistress voiced that the issue of undisclosed fathers was pertinent to her situation as she was tired of the number of children whose fathers' details were not provided on school application forms. When the fathers' whereabouts were enquired about, the mothers would often say that he is deceased. She stated that this occurrence had become so common that she had started requesting death certificates to verify the mothers' assertions.

Minimal interest was generated through the newsletters distributed by the schools as only a few (less than five) mothers sent emails requesting further information about the study, and no participant was secured from this area. This could either mean that mothers do not read school newsletters, or, as cited by Richter, Norris, Pettifor, Yach, and Cameron (2007), individuals from higher socioeconomic classes are harder to enrol in studies as they perceive fewer benefits and more inconvenience in participating in research. The Human Science Research Council's media release also reported a challenge in enrolling affluent people for their national health survey (HSRC, 2012).

Freedom Park

Freedom Park is described as a semi-formal settlement area characterised by high unemployment levels and as having most of the residents relying on social grants (Kgobe, Baatjes, & Sotuku, 2012). In this district, an NGO dealing with orphans and vulnerable children invited the researcher to a meeting with the guardians to brief them about the study. During this meeting, participants were verbally informed about the study.

Participants interested in volunteering in the research elaborated that they would be more comfortable with personal interviews and were not keen on discussing the subject under study in a focus group. The researcher acquiesced in this request, noted the interested participants' contact details, and advised that they would be contacted at a later stage to schedule the in-depth interviews. A suitable day and time for conducting the interview was agreed on with the individual participants. Nine guardians and mothers were initially recruited from this session. Some of the guardians could not be included in the study as they did not meet the recruitment criteria, and this became known when interviews were being scheduled.

Selecting suitable participants

A paper-based survey[3] with short screening questions had initially been created to evaluate whether participants met the criteria of the study. An online replicated version of the screening questions was created using Google docs, and the link was posted on some of the online advertisements or forwarded to participants who contacted the researcher by email. The screening questions collected some situational information about the participant in order to evaluate if they met the criteria to be included in the study, for example "*Are you a mother?"* Responses were captured by selecting the applicable answer "*Yes*" or *"No"* in a check box.

In Lyn Turney's 2005 study: "*Paternity Secrets: Why Women Do Not Tell"*, the participants had displayed a preference for telephonic and email based written interviews as opposed to face-to-face interviews. Respondents were thus asked if they would be comfortable to share their stories in a focus group setting, and to indicate which mode of conducting the interview they would be comfortable in, i.e. face-to-face, telephonic or email, or if none of these, to

[3] Appendix3: Survey

suggest their preferred method in the section "*other*". Participants who responded *"yes"* to the survey question "*Do you have any children under your care that do not know the identity of their father?"* were considered suitable to participate in the study.

The use of online screening questions was a time-efficient method, and the feedback mechanism allowed the responses to be compiled in a spreadsheet format indicating when the survey had been completed and which respondents had responded positively to the inclusion criterion question. In line with the snowball sampling principle, all respondents were kindly requested to forward the screening survey's link to other females whom they deemed would be interested in participating in the study. Participants also left their contact details to enable the researcher to contact them with respect to scheduling an interview.

The online screening survey obtained 42 respondents of which 11 responded *"Yes"* to the criterion question. Some respondents had expressed initial interests in participating in the study but had not responded to further emails scheduling an interview day; one participant could not be included as she had open communication with her child about the biological father even though the father had deserted the family. Only one face-to-face, in-depth interview was secured using this strategy.

Regional Radio

In addition, a regional radio station broadcasting in the broader Gauteng area was approached to assist in recruiting participants. The information about the study was announced during one of the shows, and listeners were given the researcher's contact details. No female affected by the topic came forward; however, men who grew up not knowing who their fathers called the researcher to enquire more about the study. This indicated the pervasiveness of children growing up without knowing their fathers' identities, and the discomfort of mothers to engage in the topic.

Despite the extensive recruitment process, only eight participants were recruited. These participants were mostly from the Freedom Park area; others were recruited online or through word of mouth. Some of the women expressed that they participated in the study in order to obtain more information regarding women who are in a similar situation as themselves. The women freely volunteered to participate, and most were forthcoming with their experiences during the interviews.

The researcher recruited mothers and guardians that had children under their care who did not know who their biological fathers were and could explore, with willing mothers, issues that contributed to paternal non-disclosure. The mothers providing an account based on their lived experience of not telling their children who their fathers are, enabled the acquisition of unique, rich and detailed stories that provided insight to the phenomenon of undisclosed paternal identity and maternal non-disclosure. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes, and some participants opted to meet in public spaces. The interview commenced with the researcher asking the participant how they related to the subject under study, and the interviews lasted on average, an hour.

3.2.2 Description of Participants

Out of the eight participants who presented themselves for this study, three of the women were guardians of children who did not know their biological fathers, and the rest were biological mothers. The circumstances surrounding the women obtaining guardianship varied with two participants becoming guardians due to the children being maternal orphans, and one case where the biological mother had "abandoned" the child in the guardian's care. The women ranged in age from 33 years to 60 years old. Five of the participants were from the Freedom park area, and three came from other areas within Johannesburg. Seven of the women were of African descent, and one woman was Caucasian. The education level of the

Freedom Park women ranged between primary school and high school levels. The participants from the other areas, had all completed their high school education, and two of the women had postgraduate degrees. On conducting the interview, it was found that one of the participants (Janice, 45 years old) had grown up not knowing her father's identity and her child was raised with an absent father whose identity had been disclosed to the child. That material was included as it was deemed that her experience of dealing with undisclosed paternal identity could provide insight on how or why her father's identity was concealed from her, as well as garner her motivations for choosing disclosure with her child, and the strategies that she used for her disclosure.

3.3 Data Source

As this is an exploratory study, the researcher had aimed to formulate a semi-structured interview guide grounded on some of the findings of the focus group. Women facing maternal non-disclosure in a group setting would have provided varying views and these findings would have given direction in terms of areas around undisclosed paternity and maternal non-disclosure that could be explored further during the in-depth interviews as suggested by Patton (2002). Focus groups were not conducted as there were not sufficient participants interested in sharing their experiences in this platform. The interview schedule was thus constructed based on the objectives of the study.

3.3.1 Interview Schedule

Semi-structured interviews are a commonly used tool in qualitative studies, and are appropriate for phenomenological studies (Langdridge, 2007). The researcher formulated the semi-structured interview guide[4] around the three main areas:

- Factors that contributed to non-disclosure of the biological father's identity
- Impact of the non-disclosure on the mother
- Mother-child dynamics in the face of undisclosed paternal identity

The interview guide's questions were open-ended, which allowed probing and for participants to answer in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses. The interview schedule's questions were translated into the local language (Zulu and Tswana)[5], to ensure that the core insinuation of the questions was still maintained in the translated format. This process also allowed the researcher to familiarise herself with the interview schedule.

A pilot interview was conducted with a female volunteer who met the study criteria. This interview allowed an evaluation of the appropriateness of the questions, time frame for conducting the interviews, and provided a trial to ensure that the researcher is familiar with operating the audio recording devices. The pilot provided insight into the varying situations that might be encountered while gathering the data and hence the interview questions were

[4] Appendix 4

[5] Of the nine African languages recognised in South Africa, all but two languages (Venda and Tsonga) can be grouped into two clusters Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swati) and Se-Sotho (Setswana, Sesotho and Sepedi). The languages within a cluster have a degree of mutual intelligibility that allows intra group accessibility, i.e. a Xhosa speaker would be able to understand Zulu, and similarly of the speakers in the Sesotho cluster (Prah, 2007)

formatted into three broad categories, as specific pre-formulated questions may not have been applicable to some participants. The interview schedule thus served as a guide for the interview process. A question exploring the circumstances that led to some of the participants obtaining guardianship was also included, as not all participants were biological mothers of the affected children. The data from the pilot interview did not form part of the final data analysis.

3.3.2 Biography tool

The biography tool[6] was constructed partially to elucidate the varying circumstances of undisclosed paternal identity and maternal non-disclosure conflated within the context of absent and unknown whereabouts of fathers. Some participants had been recruited through word-of- mouth, and had not completed the online survey. Other participants had expressed interest to volunteer for the study based on the researcher mentioning to the women attending the NGO meeting that she was conducting research on children who do not know their fathers. In Freedom Park, the aforementioned statement could not be qualified with "*and the guardian has not told the child who the father is*" as the phrase is value-laden, and the participants were being recruited in a group setting.

The group's literacy level also did not permit the paper-based survey to be administered. The biography tool then served to ascertain the context of undisclosed paternal identity, and to reaffirm the suitability of including the participant. Some of the questions, which were in the instrument, required "*yes*" or "*no*" responses and included: "*Father's whereabouts known," "Mother/guardian has told child who (biological) father is."*

[6] Appendix 5: Biography tool

This tool also served to collect demographic data, age, race, etc., and other information that could give meaningful insight towards the findings, such as the age of the child. The instrument was administered at the end of the interview, and was completed by the researcher asking participants the questions. It facilitated triangulating some of the information that had already been provided during the interviews, and some participants provided further useful information as this form was being completed.

3.4 Procedure

Participants recruited online were given an option to choose in which manner they would prefer doing the in-depth interview, and they were asked if they were comfortable participating in a focus group. Providing options on how the interviews would be conducted was an approach selected in order to put potential participants at ease, so that those who wanted to maintain a higher sense of anonymity by having an email or telephonic interview could still be included.

This principle was also borrowed from the feminist ideology of allowing women to express themselves in a space which they are comfortable in (Brayton, 1997; Sarantakos, 2004). Potential respondents were informed that filling out the survey had no financial benefits, and the purpose of the survey was to assess if mothers and guardians met the criteria to be included in an ensuing academic study. The participants were advised that all responses would be kept confidential.

As stipulated in the sampling procedure, participants who responded affirmatively to the screening question, *"Do you have any children under your care that do not know the identity of their father?"* were considered as meeting the criteria to be included in the study, and were

forwarded an information sheet[7]. The participants were politely requested to respond if they were still interested in volunteering in the study. Other respondents who did not meet the inclusion criteria were thanked for their participation in the online survey and advised why they could not be included in the study. The online survey allowed the participants to maintain a degree of anonymity, and their contact details will be erased, and the email account will be closed after the examination of this thesis.

As the information sheet had not been translated, participants from Freedom Park were verbally informed about the contents of the information sheet in a language, which they were comfortable in at the recruitment session and prior to the interview being conducted. Pivotal aspects about informed consent (voluntary participation, right to withdraw, guaranteed confidentiality and consent to be audio recorded) were reiterated before the participants affirmed their understanding by signing the informed consent sheet[8], and the interview then commenced. Interviews were conducted between June and August 2012. The researcher is multilingual in most languages spoken in and around Johannesburg, and as such she used a language that the participant was comfortable with, and the interview was audio recorded. Two to three interviews were scheduled per Saturday. In Freedom Park, the interviews were conducted at the women's homes. Participants from other areas suggested meeting either at their homes, or at coffee shops. One participant specifically requested that the interview take place in a public place and not at her home, as she did not want her husband, who was not the biological father of her son, to know that she was involved in something which discusses her son's biological father, because he would not approve.

[7] Appendix6: Participant information sheet

[8] Appendix7: Informed consent sheet

Conducting interviews at the participants' homes allowed a certain degree of comfort for the women as it was their personal space. However, it brought certain challenges as often the participant was not home alone and there would sometimes be disturbances. For home interviews, the researcher tried to ensure auditory privacy by requesting to be alone with the participant during the interview, but this was not always possible.

The interviews were conducted during the cold season, and in Freedom Park where the households are situated in very small spaces, it was at times inevitable that a family member would be nearby. The researcher made the participant aware of this, and the women acquiesced to the family member's presence. The length of the interviews ranged from one hour to one and a half hours. There were two anomalies whereby the interviews lasted under 30 minutes.

3.5 Data Collection

The Freedom Park participants had been clear that they would prefer in-depth interviews. In the other areas, the recruitment strategy did not yield enough participants to proceed with the focus group. This contrasted with Nduna's (under review) study, where participants had freely contributed their experiences in a group setting. Patton (2002) states that in-depth, one-on-one, interviews conducted face-to-face are useful for exploring sensitive topics with individuals, which they would not have been comfortable revealing in a group setting. The researcher personally conducted all the interviews for the study.

3.5.1 In-depth individual interviews

As the participants and the researcher are women, it allowed a certain level of rapport and comfort. Gender-matched interviews are normative in similar studies and are encouraged in

order to avoid gender power dynamics, create a safe space for women and encourage honest disclosure (Nduna, Sikweyiya, Khunou, Pambo, & Mdletshe, submitted). The interviews were scheduled on weekends or after working hours and were largely conducted at the participants' homes. Herzog (2005) acknowledges that interviews dealing with highly private issues are best conducted in the home of the participants as the setting would offer a sense of "intimacy" and "friendliness."

The interview took on a format of a conversation as recommended by Kahn (2000) and commenced with the interviewer asking the participant how they related with the topic under study. This allowed the interviewee to initially freely express their experience without the constraints of a specific question. The conversation and questions narrowed from the general to the more particular, as questions from the interview guide were addressed. Questions were asked in line with the conversation, and when it was appropriate for probing to occur (Langdridge, 2007). A retrospective approach was required on some questions as the participants needed to reflect on past lived experiences (Kahn, 2000). Memory and language facilitated the retrospective access to the lived experience.

It was an interactive dialogue where the interviewer listened attentively as the participants told their narratives. Issues of interest that arose were probed further lest they shed new light on the topic. Some participants who began crying during the interview were asked if they were all right and were offered an option to stop the interview; the women refused this offer. Only one interview had to be rescheduled due to the participant being overwhelmed emotionally. During this interview the participant had requested that recording be stopped and after complying with the request the interviewer had remained with the participant until the emotional distress had been contained. The participant refused assistance from the referral inventory and for more personalised counselling to be sourced for them. The participant did however request to be contacted again regarding rescheduling the interview.

During the interview, the broad interview guide's categories were explored with all participants but not necessarily in the same order. Issues of interest that arose from other participants' interviews were carried over to subsequent interviews and explored. In concluding the interviews, questions from the biography tool were explored with the participants and participants were provided with the referral inventory list.

The data collection encountered one of the challenges that are common during qualitative data collection but rarely mentioned in reports. Easton, Mc Comish, and Greenberg (2000) mention equipment failure as one of these pragmatic challenges. Although the researcher had familiarised herself with the device, problems were encountered, in particular, when three interviews were scheduled per day and the researcher was avoiding unnecessary handling of the device, lest there be erroneous deletion of data before it is downloaded. This resulted in undetected malfunctioning of the plug-in microphone, and failure to record three of the interviews conducted on that particular day.

The data were, however, salvaged by explaining to the participants what had occurred and requesting their willing assistance in scheduling another interview. The second interview inadvertently triangulated what was said in the first interview as similar questions were explored. As the researcher downloaded the audio at the end of each interview day, notes of the un-recorded interviews were made while they were still new to memory, and forwarded to participants to validate the contents. During this process of making notes, the researcher became cognisant that the actual interview between the researcher and the participant is a multifaceted, temporal interaction that can never truly be recaptured even through a second interview.

3.6 Data Analysis

Setati (2003) highlighted that a transcript should be understood as text that "re-presents" what was said during the interview and not be understood as the event itself. It is a re-construction of reality. In terms of the data analysis process, the interviews allowed the researcher to become familiar with the scope of the data, and the transcription process augmented the data familiarisation as the interviewer personally conducted this. In order to uphold protecting the participant's privacy and to avoid further data loss, the digital audio recordings were downloaded onto the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected.

As the data was originally in audio format, this data was transcribed by the researcher from audio into text, and some of the interviews had to be translated. Similarly as in Turney's (2005) study, participants and people mentioned in the interviews were de-identified by being assigned pseudonyms and aliases, and this was in line with the ethical consideration of protecting people's identities. All audio was checked against the text to ensure a proximal match.

3.6.1 Transcription

The main challenge in any process of transcription is to ensure that the transcript retains the authenticity and intended meaning of what was said during the interview (Ross, 2010). The researcher transcribed each of the interviews, and the transcription per interview was done over a period of two days. The first day consisted of getting the largeness of the audio into the text, and the second day was for checking the accuracy of the text against the audio, and verifying that the punctuation reflected the meaning of what was said. The transcripts were on average 14 pages long with the shortest interview yielding five pages and the longest 20 pages.

The amount of detail included in the transcript does not merely consist of what was said, but it has to serve the analytical approach that is to be used (Setati, 2003). The spoken word and the textual format are never the same, therefore, to give a bit more depth to the text, the transcript included underlining words and phrases which were emphasised when they were spoken by the participants, gestures and emotions expressed during the interviews, and eclipses were used to notate the participants pauses.

It is said that the interpretive manner of producing transcripts can be seen as a creative process that reveals as much about the transcriber as what is actually transcribed, and the influence of the person transcribing cannot be ignored (Ross, 2010; Setati, 2003). Langdridge (2007), states that for thematic analysis transcribing the interviews verbatim is sufficient for the analytic technique. Verbatim transcription was possible for the interviews conducted in English, and interviews conducted in other languages will be discussed further under the translation method.

The interviews conducted in public spaces posed the challenge of certain segments being inaudible due to intruding sound from the environment, and this was noted in the transcript. As there was a lapse of time between when the interview was conducted and when the data was analysed; further notes were initially included in order to enhance understanding about the context in which specific things were said, and what the researcher understood as being implied at the time. The researcher developed a transcription format with the first interview, and this format served as a template for subsequent transcribed interviews. The transcription template as recommended by McLellan, Mac Queen, and Neidig (2003) ensured that the textual data for all transcripts was generated in a consistent and systematic manner and ready for analysis.

3.6.2 Translation

The interviews conducted in Setswana, Xhosa, and Zulu, were transcribed and directly translated into English to facilitate the data analysis and report writing. Setati (2003) stated that the process of translation cannot be assumed to be a straightforward procedure because language is not merely a vocal expression of ideas but rather "a social product that arises from a particular context." At times, ideas, concepts, and feelings might not always translate in the exact form from one language to another, and this notion can also be applied to when the interviews were conducted with the participants.

One example which comes to mind, is that in Setswana, social convention dictates that certain words be used to convey respect when addressing someone older than yourself, whereas this convention may not be available in English. This study did include participants older than the researcher and even though the described social convention was used during interviews it could not be reflected in the translated transcript resulting in a loss of some cultural meanings. Furthermore, words from certain languages do not always have English equivalents, and some terms have multiple English equivalents that can be selected to "re-present" what was said (Masanyana, 2005).

For example, the Setswana word, *re tla semola*, meaning 'we can *start*', the phrase 'we can *begin'* can also be used when translating. Thus during the translation process it can be said the researcher "interpreted" how the non-English participants expressed themselves in the transcript. Temple and Young (2004) correctly state that the translator makes assumptions about meaning equivalence of what was said, which makes the translator a cultural broker in the process.

Discourse around transcriptions and translation recommends that the translation of the text should be delayed in the research process, as translating the text before the data are analysed has implications for the findings produced (Halai, 2007; Temple & Young, 2004). This

suggestion could not be applied in this study as the researcher is conversant in the African languages, enabling an understanding of the spoken language, and has a limited dexterity in the written aspects of the language.

The back translation of the text would have assisted in ensuring the closeness of the translated text, and external assistance could also verify the proximity of the translation. Translation studies do acknowledge that even with that mechanism in place any two or more reasonable people would still disagree about the best translated version of any given passage (Ross, 2010; Temple & Young, 2004). Insisting on absolute equivalence is ineffectual as irrespective of the language used, utterances carry with them a set of assumptions, feelings, and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of. The conversation is also filtered and understood within the researcher's experiences and world sphere, which may not necessarily be conveyed in the receiver's understanding (Temple & Young, 2004). None-the-less, the translated transcripts endeavoured to capture the nuances and meanings as intended by the participants and as understood by the researcher without (intentionally) compromising the validity of the data.

Ross (2010) distinguishes between a covert translation as being more concerned with equivalence at a social and cultural meaning, and an overt translation focuses on equivalence at a textual level in terms of creating a word-for-word match in meaning. For this study, the translation process was a negotiation between (i) capturing exactly what was said (substituting the African word with an English equivalent when available), (ii) retaining the original meaning, (iii) making grammatical sense in the target language as well as (iv) communicating the social meaning of what was said, in line with the ethos of a covert translation.

The fact that the researcher had conducted and translated the interview was beneficial as when a selected word did not adequately signify what was actually said or meant, the

researcher could recognise this and consult native speakers of that particular language to obtain the next-best match, which at times was not available. In those cases, a transliteration was provided with the word or phrase italicised in the original language, and the implied meaning provided in parenthesis. Some non-English words that are understood by the general populace (e.g. baba, gogo, etc.) were also left in the transcript.

For some bilingual participants, the interview was conducted mainly in English, and the conversation moved back and forth to their native languages. For purposes of this study, the non-English parts were translated. All transcripts were re-checked against the audio as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Halai (2007) refers to her transcripts as being transmuted because they have essentially changed during the process of translation even though the essence is still contained within the text. Likewise, in this study, the transmuted textual data from the in-depth interviews were then subjected to thematic analysis. Three transcripts were sent back to the participants who had email addresses for member checking and verification, and only one participant (Pamela, 33 years old) responded back and was in agreement with the contents.

3.6.3. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Langdridge, 2007). This approach is said to be the basis of qualitative analytic procedures and in a way informs all qualitative methods (Anderson, 2007). It is an analytic approach utilised for making sense of the participants' world, and was employed to make meaning of the women's experiences by identifying the universal and individual essence of the themes, experienced by non-disclosing mothers notwithstanding the varying backgrounds of the women .

Riessman (2005), states that the emphasis of thematic analysis is on the content of the text as it explores "what" is said as opposed to "how" it was said. This approach as a method of analysis is useful for theorising across a number of cases, and finding common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2005). An inductive approach was used to analyse the data, and the themes were initially identified and named from the actual words which were used by the participants (Anderson, 2007). Babbie (2004) describes induction as:

> "Moving from the particular to the general, from a set of specific observations to the discovery of a pattern that represents some degree of order among all the given event…. your discovery doesn't necessarily tell you why the pattern exists-just that it does". (p. 25)

The researcher's subjective interpretation and prior assumptions should be suspended until the later stages of the research enabling the data talk for itself (K. Kelly, 1999). What the participants say is deemed as evidence for what they experienced, and a classification of similar responses can be produced, with all responses being given equal value. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 35), summarised the following phases as guidelines for thematic content analysis:

Phase 1: Getting familiar with the data

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Phase 3: Searching for themes

Phase 4: Reviewing the themes

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Phase 6: Writing the report

The transcripts were read and re-read in an active manner in order for the researcher to familiarise herself with the breadth and content of the data. Ideally, it is recommended that the entire data set should be read through before the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006); however, as the analysis of the material is a recursive process, the researcher commenced to engage with the narratives as they were being transcribed.

Codes are deemed as the basic elements of the text that can be assessed as giving meaningful insight about the phenomenon being investigated (Boyatzis, 1998 cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each response in all the individual transcripts was coded, sentence by sentence, and text that supports the code was extracted and grouped accordingly. There were no preconceived codes, and the codes emerged from what the participants said.

Microsoft Excel was used for this analytic process as it provided an efficient and user-friendly framework for cutting and pasting the relevant codes and supporting textual responses into a spreadsheet. Each transcript had its own provisional sub-themes, which were then collated for the entire data set. Sub-themes from individual transcripts that did not have sufficient supporting text were regrouped into relevant provisional themes or collapsed.

The entire data set was then re-read to verify that the provisional themes form a logical pattern within each transcript and in relation to the whole data set, bearing in mind how these themes related to the study's objectives and research questions. Thematic maps indicating the relationship of themes and sub-themes to each other were formulated and the themes (and sub-themes) were further refined and defined.

The refine and define process involved writing a detailed account about what the theme is about and how it related to the overall data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then

analysed the themes against further literature reviewed, and the findings will be reported according to how the themes relate to the study's research questions and objectives. While the thematic analysis could provide the subjective essence of the women's experience, it is limited as it provides a description of what the participants said and does not go beyond that. A critical inspection of the findings was grounded by the feminist principle, which dictates that the politics of gender have to be taken into consideration when analysing the findings.

3.6.4 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument by which knowledge is generated, and this contrasts with the positivist paradigm where the researcher is objective and 'detached' in producing objective truth (Brayton, 1997; Langdridge, 2007). This process is concerned with the researcher critically assessing how their social location (sex, race, class, etc.) and world-view have impacted on questions, methods chosen and the subsequent produced knowledge (Langdridge, 2007). It thus becomes important that the researcher's position is clarified and providing these reflections for inspection is often considered a key element of ethical and rigorous qualitative research. The process is ongoing from conception of the study questions, during data collection and after the research. For purposes of this exercise, the process will be elaborated on.

Motivation for the research

When I initially formulated the study to investigate why mothers do not tell their children who their true fathers are, it was after engaging with literature on undisclosed paternal identity and becoming aware of the adversity that affected children's experience. I could relate this to people who I knew had "trouble" with accepting an absent biological father even though they had an involved and seemingly adequate social father. As someone who grew up with both a present mother and father, I do not know what it is like not to have a father, more

especially not knowing his identity. I sympathised with the children, and my personal bias is that each child deserves to know their father.

I tried to engage with friends and family of both sexes on what they thought could be the reasons, and responses ranged from “she sleeps around so she does not know” to “she had an affair with a married man thus cannot disclose." Although I do concede that these circumstances occur in real life, these views differed from my worldview. I had encountered women who (i) wanted to be mothers and were not necessarily interested in being married or being involved with the father over a long term and (ii) a woman who had not disclosed to her child, and did not fit the stereotypical model of the “loose” woman. From an outsider's perspective, it was hard to discern why the woman did not/could not disclose. Literature also seemed to focus on divorced women or women who had been in long-term relationships, and seemed to ignore situations where women have children with men who are not long-term partners, and pregnancies that occur from casual sexual encounters. In a way, this implies that even with the “sexual liberation” of women, there is still sanctioning of the sexual choices of women (and people) as displayed by choice of available scientific discourse around parenthood.

By virtue that I do not have a child of my own, and thus have not experienced the phenomenon under study, this positioning gave me the outlook of an outsider. Literature engaged, and from personal cases of maternal non-disclosure that I knew, I understood that this was a sensitive and personal topic. My goal was to conduct this study with an open, empathetic, and non- judgemental outlook. Having grown up in Johannesburg and simultaneously conducting the research in the area was advantageous as I was familiar with the cultures and thus had a meaningful understanding of the context. Langdridge (2007) states

that interviewing is a skill which cannot be forged. In preparation for conducting the interviews for this study, I underwent training in qualitative research methods with a specific focus on the application of qualitative research methods when exploring the phenomenon of absent fathers. This provided valuable skills in conducting interviews with the women in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Along with this training, prior life and work experience interacting across generations and races ensured that I was comfortable interviewing the women.

This did not necessarily translate in that the participants themselves would be comfortable sharing some aspects of their stories with me. Some guardians would freely discuss the undisclosed paternity issue of the children who are under guardianship, whereas they themselves were mothers to children who did not know the identities of the biological fathers but did not discuss their own non-disclosure. It was undeniable that interviewer-interviewee factors came into play as a woman in her thirties, I was considerably younger than most of the guardians, and perchance they felt that they could not discuss some aspects of their lives with me.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand's Non Medical Human Subject Ethics Committee (protocol number H120418)[9] as well as the Psychology Department's internal ethics committee before the commencement of this study. The latter's decision also served as a peer review mechanism and strengthened the ethical and methodological soundness of the study. The study was conducted with the guidance, mentorship and training of an experienced researcher in the subject, and all ethical concerns

[9] Appendix: Ethical clearance certificate

that presented themselves during the study were communicated to the supervisor, and her advice was taken accordingly. Informed consent was obtained prior to the audio device being switched on, and all participants were thanked for giving of their time and participating in the study. Participants were also reminded about their right to withdraw from the study.

The researcher adhered to the strictest confidentiality in conduct, and no ethical values were violated during this study, as was depicted through this chapter. The research strategies were altered where appropriate to ensure that the participants' wishes were not infringed upon. Potential participants who did not respond to follow up emails were deemed as not being interested in participating in the study and the researcher respected this choice by stopping contact. Some participants were not content with the resources available from the resource inventory list[10], and the researcher had offered to source for more appropriate counselling services.

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, the selection criteria was stipulated to ensure that suitable participants who had experienced the phenomenon were included in the study, and the translation process endeavoured to closely retain what the participants expressed. Furthermore, the translation process endeavoured to retain what the participants intended to express in their native language during the interview. Adequate time was spent with each participant to ensure that all they had to articulate was addressed. Permission to keep the data for future learning purposes was verbally obtained from the participants. Audio recordings of this study ensured an accurate capturing of the data, and audio recordings are attainable, so that should any person wish to establish the veracity of the study findings, they can still do so. The raw data and paper trail of this study is available for quality assurance purposes. In

[10] The researcher had listed telephonic counselling services which are free when calling from a landline and some of the participants did not have access to landlines

conclusion, the theoretical assumptions underlying the chosen methods and methodologies in this study reasonably matched the study's aims and objectives. These decisions were also taken within the confines of sound ethical consideration.

Chapter 4: Findings

4

As participants came from wide-ranging circumstances, and were of varying ages, there was a difference in what dominated each narrative. Kvale (1996 cited in Laverty, 2003) viewed the end of the spiralling through a hermeneutic circle as occurring when one has reached a place of sensible meaning, free from inner contradictions, albeit temporarily. After subjecting the data to thematic analysis, moving in part from each transcript, and understanding each transcript in relation to the whole data set, three major themes emerged from what the participants said. There were two themes that addressed factors that contributed to maternal non-disclosures of the biological fathers' identities, and those were i) **fathers' behaviour** and ii) **nature of the relationship**. The third theme, **mothers and guardians dealing with undisclosed paternal identity and absconded fathers,** had sub-themes that revealed the challenges that mothers faced when dealing with the phenomenon within their varying contexts. To assist with the ease of reading the findings Table 1 provides the participants' assigned pseudonyms and their relationship to the children who did not know their true fathers. The chapter will deal with the description of the phenomenon, themes and sub-themes as derived from the participants' accounts.

Table 1: Pseudonyms of interview participants

Participant/ Pseudonym	Age (years)	Marital Status	Relationship to child who does not know biological father
Charlotte	*60*	Widowed	Guardian
Martha	44	Separated	Biological mother
Pamela	33	Never married	Biological mother
Zelda	50	Never married	Biological mother
Thandeka	53	Never married	Guardian
Esther	58	Divorced	Guardian (Grandmother)
Janice	44	Never married	Biological mother
Patience	35	Married	Biological mother

4.1 Description of the phenomenon

This study set out to explore factors that contribute to maternal non-disclosure, specifically alluding to children who did not know their true fathers' identities because of the mothers not having told them. Initially the constructs of undisclosed paternal identity and maternal non-disclosure may have seemed easy to categorise. However, through conducting the research and analysing the subjective experiences of the participants it became apparent that the participants viewed unknown (father) status and undisclosed (father) identity in different ways. An attempt to unpack the complexity of this phenomenon and implications for participant recruitment for research is discussed elsewhere (Padi, Nduna, Khunou, & Kholopane, submitted). For all participants, it emerged that there had been a conversation

about the father at some point in time and some candid information about the father or circumstances around the children's conception had been revealed to the children.

Despite this, some of the mothers considered themselves as not having disclosed. In addition, some children had met their fathers at some point in their lives, and it became apparent that the construct of non-disclosure is not static but rather a fluid and continuous process. At the beginning of her interview when Pamela (33 years old) was asked how she related to the topic under study she narrated, "*It's so difficult for me to start because there is no beginning and there is no end*" implying that the even though for now, she has decided not to disclose, the process was still ongoing.

Three categories were devised for the varying contact that had occurred between the men and children, as there were children who had physically met the fathers. There was the first cluster of children who had physically met their fathers as young children and lost contact later in life, and five out of the eight participants talked about such occurrence. The second cluster consisted of children whose mothers had made known the fathers' identities through showing the children pictures, prior to the children physically meeting the man later in life, and two out of eight participants reported this. Janice (44 years old) reported, "*I had some pictures of her father, and I would show her*". Janice's child met the supposed father as a young adult, and Martha's (44 years old) daughter was reacquainted with her father as a 14-year-old through a family friend. The last grouping consisted of children who had never met their fathers at all.

Janice (44 years old), a participant who grew up not knowing her biological father's identity, but raised a child who met her father later in life talked about her *'long journey'* to learn about her own father's identity. Even when she was told his identity, she said: "*I know* [him], *but I don't know him*". Charlotte (60 years old) said about the child under her guardianship

who met her father when she was of a young age: "*He is known. She knows his name, but she won't be able to point him out"*. Thus, even though it can be said that the identities of the fathers have been disclosed, and with some children having met the fathers, the men were still unknown to the children and their absence from the children's lives was prevalent. Table 2 provides the themes and the sub-themes, which emerged from what the participants said, and these will be discussed in the ensuing sections.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

<table>
<tr><th>Theme</th><th colspan="2">Sub-themes</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Theme 1: Fathers' behaviour (contributing to non-disclosure)</td><td rowspan="2">(non) Commitment to paternal responsibilities</td><td>Overt denial</td></tr>
<tr><td>Covert refutation</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">'Reluctant mothers': Non-disclosure as a protective mechanism</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Unknown whereabouts</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Theme 2: Nature of Relationship (contributing to non-disclosure)</td><td colspan="2">Gender-based violence</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Young parenthood: teenage pregnancy</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Theme 3: Mothers and guardians dealing with undisclosed paternal identity and absconded fathers</td><td colspan="2">Psychosocial support</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Socioeconomic context variation</td></tr>
</table>

4.2 Theme 1: Fathers' behaviour as a contributing factor

This theme addresses the men's behaviour as contributing towards their identities not being disclosed to the children. It also indicates how mothers and guardians dealt with undisclosed paternal identity, absconded fathers and unknown whereabouts of fathers. None of the participants in this study can be considered to be in single-parent families or that the only parent was taking care of the child by choice. The women had not wilfully decided against father involvement, but it can be said that the fathers' behaviour somehow contributed to the mothers not telling the children about them. Pamela (33 years old) stated:

> *"In terms of the decision of him not knowing his father, it is kind of a decision that I made, but it is not really a conscious decision. I let his father kind of lead me".*

In the interview, it emerged that Pamela had been discontented with the father's sporadic commitment to his paternal role. It seemed like the mothers understood that they do not have a right to keep the fathers away from their children, and there was a sense that if the fathers chose to be involved, they would still be welcome. Patience (35 years old) narrated that:

> *"Not even once in my life, did I ever think that if he ever came to me and said he wants to know his son that I would say no. No, it never crossed my mind. Even if he came today, even if he called me tomorrow, or he called me next year, he would still be welcome".*

It could be said that non-disclosure was more reactionary to the fathers' conduct and was rather used as a protective mechanism from the potential upsetting acts by the father, as will be indicated in the discussions of the sub-themes.

4.2.1 Non-commitment to paternal responsibilities

In non-commitment to paternal responsibilities, participants talked about men who had absconded from their paternal responsibilities, and some men were described as '*fathers with issues'* due to their inability to hold down employment and their inclination to alcohol and substance abuse. The men were reported to be aware of their supposed children's existence but somehow eluded their fatherly obligations, with the women talking about how they *'cannot force the men'* to take responsibility if they do not want to. To clarify the varying manner in which they absconded, this sub-theme was divided into two categories, ***overt denial***, and ***covert refutation.***

4.2.1.1. Overt denial

In overt denial, the men categorically denied paternity, and Patience (35 years old) was the only participant who reported this. She fell pregnant as a 19-year-old and narrated the following about the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy:

> *"After about a month, I discovered that I am pregnant. I was not going out with anyone except for him. I wrote him a letter. Then I told him that I am pregnant. He wrote me a letter back and said he does not want to get involved; he was injured while playing football* [implying something affected his fertility] *so it's probably not his child".*

Even after sending elders from her family to report the pregnancy to his family, the man did not rescind the denial. As a point of interest, according to Patience's account, the alleged father of her child was married and an active and involved father to his children born in-wedlock. When Patience's son had asked her about his biological father, she had told him that the father had made her pregnant and denied responsibility. In light of this disclosure,

when asked during the interview if she still considered herself a mother who has not disclosed, she said:

> *"I tell myself that I am reluctant to tell him. I am just reluctant. I will tell him but not yet. I will tell him".*

Patience elaborated on the issue of the father's identity as '*one of those things you hope they never asked'*. There seemed to be a cognisance among some of the participants that the issue of the father will come up but maybe, due to lack of awareness or availability of information, they do not know how to handle it.

4.2.1.2. Covert refutation

In this sub-theme, the men tacitly acknowledge paternity by not denying it explicitly, but despite this, they never take up their paternal responsibilities. This manifested in temporal commitment to their fatherly roles through desertion followed by intermittent reappearances, as well as menial financial contributions and failing to meet the financial promises they made. In this group, there was also an ongoing pattern of absconding, whereby the men were reported to have other children with other women whom they do not take care of, emotionally or otherwise. Two participants mentioned this and they reported that the men had moments when they were '*proud fathers'* but it seemed that they could not convert this fatherly pride to a constant supportive role for their children. This in turn resulted in conflict with the mother, who needed the father to be consistent, as was the case with Pamela (33 years old) who had her child as a young adult soon after completing her tertiary studies. Pamela stated:

> *"You cannot say this year I'm going to be a dad and next year I'm not going to do it. I needed him to be consistent. He was going to be consistently there as a father, or he was consistently not going to be a father".*

In contrast to the narratives about fathers who do not commit to their fatherly obligations, three participants talked about fathers who 'provided'. The provision was not referring to financial contributions but rather fathers who were present, consistent and kept to the scheduled visits with their children, and were committed to their father role. Charlotte (60 years old) made an example of her husband who was not the biological father of the child; he would go to the clinic at 4am to make sure that the guardian and child are ahead in the queue when the clinic eventually opened. Fathers who provide were described as fathers who made an *'effort'*.

4.2.2. 'Reluctant mothers': Non-disclosure as a protective mechanism

This theme is in support for the supposition that mothers' not telling is not a deliberate exclusion of father involvement, or a purposeful act of concealing the fathers' identities. Patience and Pamela talked about how they joined this study in order to find out more information about other mothers in similar circumstances. Interrogating the mothers' responses further, there was an indication that the mothers were contemplating telling the children, but they were uncertain of how to tell, and at what age it would be appropriate to discuss the issue. There was the issue of what do they say to their children. The mothers felt that the child had to ask as they did not want to be bearers of unpleasant news and in turn be blamed for disclosing. As Martha (45 years old) narrated:

> *"I could not sit down and tell her. I wanted her to come to me and ask. Then I will be the wrong one and hated for telling her things she did not need to know".*

As mentioned under the description of the phenomena section, conversations around the father had emerged previously when the children asked questions about their true fathers. It

could be said that from the conversation, or rather the mothers' responses, the children perceived the topic as uncomfortable. Most participants talked about how the children had asked once and '*never asked me again';* some children were deemed too young to be asking about the father. In other narratives, the children were commended for their level of maturity for having *'accepted'* the mothers' responses without further questioning. This adoration of a child's maturity was seen with Patience, who praised her child for not telling his friends that her husband was not his biological father referring to the secrecy as a '*good thing'*. Patience reported:

> *"The good part, he doesn't even tell them that it's not his real dad. That is what I love about him".*

There seemed to be an overall silence around the absent father in these interviews except for Janice. Janice (45 years old), who fell pregnant with her child when she was a University student told her child and arranged for the child to meet the father. Janice commended herself for having broken what she regarded as her family's inter-generational silence around absent and unknown fathers, and she explained the following regarding her personal experience of growing up with the silence:

> *"There was this silence that as a child you do not understand. You would feel like you are asking something, which you are not supposed to be asking in the family, and you get to learn that it is something that is not talked about".*

It appears that for Janice, the cultural script to silence this conversation informed the initial withdrawal of information about the father of her child; something that she grew up with and learned at home. However, she made a conscious decision to end this practice. For other participants, the father became something that was not talked about. Charlotte responded that they do not talk about the father with her child. The commonality in the narratives was that

the unknown fathers did not frequently come up in conversation. However, some participants seemed to deflect the topic and "normalise" contexts of absent biological fathers. For instance, when Thandeka's child brought up a conversation that he had with a friend who was being raised by a non-biological father she said that she told him that he should not worry about it. Thandeka reported:

> *"The story they were talking about with his friend. I told him some men are like that, they run away from their children. Don't bother yourself with that, and he never talked about it again".*

The culture of absent fathers and matriarchal families seemed to also contribute to the phenomenon where mothers feel that the children are indifferent towards the father figure, as it is perceived to be the norm within their communities for fathers to be absent. Janice, who had been the third generation in her family who had grown up not knowing and not being told about her biological father, talked about how it was viewed as a '*family curse'*, and how it was '*accepted'* that fathers are never there. Esther shared a similar experience and explained:

> *"When you are like me, and you are raising children in a home without a man. They* [children] *are unlikely to ask you 'Where is our father*?"

An illustration of mothers using non-disclosure as a protective mechanism is Pamela, who got pregnant as a young adult in her mid-twenties. During the interview, Pamela said she was not keen to reintroduce her son (5 years old) to his father who had a propensity of being inconsistent. The man had initially disappeared when she was seven months pregnant, briefly reappeared when the child was born only to disappear again. When he reappeared after three years of absence, Pamela had a prerequisite that he could initially be introduced to the child as an *'uncle'* until she can ascertain that he will be consistent from thereon. She later

explained that she was '*scared'* for her child as he was old enough to remember encountering the father and he would get used to the idea of a father only to be disappointed. She reported:

> "*I was scared for him* [child], *because I thought he* [father] *would make the effort again for two three months and then disappear again...I did not want Kyle dealing with the disappointment when he grows up with a father who is there and then the father is not there. A father who does not show up when he says he will...maybe I was wrong, but for me that makes sense".*

Pamela's decision can be considered as even-handed when contrasted against Martha whose daughter met her father when she was 14 years old. Martha described how her child had been affected after being reintroduced to her father by a family friend only to be deprived of the fatherly affection and stated the following as she recounted the story:

> *"He introduced her to his children* [her half siblings]. *Then he stopped being in touch. She was crying over that...she was crying because she was getting used to the idea that she has a dad, but he stopped calling in December. Even the things he promised, that is when her heart was sore, and she said she doesn't want him no more".*

In Patience's case where the father had unequivocally denied paternity, she shielded her child from the rejection and the pain she thought was likely to follow by disclosing, and she said during the interview:

> *"I cannot even begin to tell my son because his father doesn't want anything to do with him. How do I tell my son about him* [the father] *who doesn't even want to know him? How do I do that*?"

The fact that Patience was also now married hindered discussion around the biological father as she was of the view that her husband would not appreciate her attempting to contact the

purported father, which would compromise the health of her marital relationship. Thus in a way new relationship statuses, specifically marriage in this case, can contribute towards non-disclosure.

4.2.3. Unknown whereabouts

Four of the participants reported that the fathers' whereabouts were not known. It is uncertain whether all the men are aware of the existence of their supposed children. In the instance of Esther as the maternal grandmother, she had never met the father of her grandson and had no further information about the father except what her deceased daughter had said, which was that he was a '*man from Maputo'*. Migrating men from neighbouring African countries characterised this sub-theme in the narratives from the Freedom Park area. It could be said that the informal settlement facilitates pregnancies with migrating men as the environment provides temporary shelter for the men who often go back to their home countries only to resettle in a different area upon their return Esther (58 years old) surmised this notion and said:

> "*You know how people from Maputo are. They come here, then they leave...when they come back they start living in another area...you see, such things".*

The television show renowned for reuniting long lost family members *'Khumbul'e khaya' w*as cited by some participants as an option to assist in locating the fathers, and at the time of conducting the interviews, the participants had not done so yet. The mothers and guardians had different reactions to fathers whose whereabouts were not known. There were participants to whom it seemed unnecessary to tell the children that they do not know where the father is, as there was nothing further to say. It seemed that the guardians felt that as the fathers' whereabouts were not known, having a father was immaterial to the children. Esther explained the following about her grandchildren:

"The children do not care anymore because I told them the truth that I do not know where the father is".

4.2.3.1. Fathers in society and socio-cultural influences and significance

Absent and unknown fathers have become a common occurrence yet society seemed to take it as a given that there will be a biological father present in the children's lives. This sub-theme emerged as participants talked about how their children started enquiring about their fathers after schoolwork required them to include written work about their fathers. It indicated a lack of consideration within school environments that not all children have fathers in their lives; and that some of the children may not know who their biological fathers are. This often left the child conflicted about whom they should write in instances where they had a present father figure who is not necessarily a biological father. Some children deemed that a more socially acceptable answer to explain the unknown absent father would be to say that he is deceased. Janice explained the following:

"A lot of times I didn't know what to say with regard to my father. In fact, people would finish off my sentences I remember. I would just say, [hesitant] *he passed on...they would say, "What? Did he pass on* [?]*" and I would say yes he passed on".*

Similarly, for Martha's child, when the child found out about how her father abused her elder sister the child would also say at school that her father was dead so as to conceal the *'shame'*. For other participants, the enquiry came after the child became aware that other children have fathers. For example, Pamela explained that she thought that her child started asking her about his father when his younger sibling who has an involved father who picks her up on weekends started wondering '*why there is no father coming to pick him up'.* The mothers often thought that by virtue of having at least one present parent the situation was '*not too*

bad' for the children. Some participants explained how they thought undisclosed and absent fathers in society were quite prevalent, as marked by the popularity of the show '*Khumbul e Khaya'*. Janice thought that there was a historical basis for the occurrence as the migrant labour system made it '*acceptable'* for men to leave their children behind.

4.3 Theme 2: Nature of relationship

This theme refers to the current standing of the relationship between the parents. It is characterised by the instability of the parents' relationship at the time of the birth, estrangement between the parents with the rift resulting in loss of contact, which in turn created a space for the fathers to be unknown to the child. All the narratives except for Martha's (separated from husband) indicated that the biological mothers were not married to the supposed fathers of the children at the time of the child's birth. In addition, gender-based violence featured predominantly in the narratives. Another matter that emerged was young parenthood which will be discussed in the ensuing section. Another reason cited for the estrangement between parents was multiple concurrent sexual partners, which is indicative of an unstable partnership.

4.3.1 Gender-based violence

In the sub-theme of gender-based violence, the abuse happened when the children had already been born or when the partner was pregnant (4 out of 8 participants talked about this). Pamela talked about, "*He hit me a million times before I left him*." The abusive man would abandon the family, and the mother would be '*scared to look for him', 'just in case he would finish her off*' as was mentioned by Thandeka (53 years old). The separation between parents often meant that the father was not in touch with the family, resulting in him being unknown

to the child(ren). Sexual abuse also featured in the narratives as resulting in estrangement. Martha had three daughters, with the last child being sired by the "undisclosed father". When she discovered that her husband had sexually abused her eldest daughter it caused their separation. She stated:

> *"He raped my child, and this child was affected mentally...she was still young. I then did not let him near my children. I thought it better that we should separate".*

The father would later be incarcerated for *'pointing of a firearm'* at Martha resulting in the lost contact with his own biological child, and the child growing up with an absent and a father unknown to her. The sexual abuse in the home also led to anti-father sentiments where Martha explained that her children were wary of male figures in their home, and how they sometimes talked about harming the father.

4.3.2 Young parenthood

It is common to associate young parenthood with unstable partnerships, as the parents are still young and unlikely to be together in the long-term. Janice and Patience felt that their teenage pregnancy contributed to their circumstances. Patience felt that had she been older she would have used more discretion to choose a suitable partner to father her child. She felt very strongly about education around young parenthood, and availability of information around family planning and safe sex awareness for young people.

Both participants used their life experience of being young parents to educate the girl children they were raising about the downfalls of young parenthood. Invariably, the teenage pregnancy affected the young mother with the girl often having to abandon or delay furthering their education in order to raise the child. Both participants also seemed to be more

accepting of the disproportionate effect, and both of them said they do not *'blame'* the father. Patience reported:

> *"I cannot hold him responsible for not taking care of him. Maybe he had his reasons; maybe he was young as well, because he was also 24, 25* [years old], *so I cannot really say... I cannot really blame him".*

Overall, there was minimal influence of traditional African cultural practises in the data but Charlotte made reference that the biological mother of the child under her guardianship said she was not on good terms with the father, as he had not paid cultural dues for making her pregnant out-of-wedlock. Charlotte stated:

> *"I asked her why she hates him, and she said* [it is because] *he made her pregnant, but he does want to pay money for damages".*

Esther reported that they had paid '*lobola'* for her granddaughter, whose parents were estranged, in order for her as the paternal grandmother to gain custody over the child. One concern that has been cited in international literature about undisclosed fathers is that they often result in the severance of the connection with the extended family from the fathers' side (Beeson et al., 2011). This was evident in this study whereby the rift between the parents also meant a distant relationship with the paternal extended family even when they were aware of the child's existence.

The participants often felt that the paternal relatives could be involved in the children's lives but chose not to be. Pamela talked about her experience when she introduced her son to the paternal grandparents as giving them an '*opportunity on a silver platter'* to be part of his life. Charlotte was left questioning why the father's family never bothered to visit the child, as they knew where she lived, she said: "*There is nothing blocking them from coming to see the*

child. The aunt knows we live here". It could be said that in the absence of a culturally recognised norm for the extended paternal family to acknowledge grandchildren, such as the man paying cultural dues for the non-marital pregnancy, or the parents having been previously married; when the unmarried parents' relationship ended it limited further interaction between the children and kin from the fathers' side.

4.4. Theme 3: Mothers and guardians dealing with undisclosed paternal identity and absconded fathers

Seven mothers who participated in this study talked about how they were *'okay'*, and that they have '*dealt with it'*. These phrases underplay the negative experience of an absconding and absent father. Even though at the time of conducting the interviews the women were *'okay'*, the experience was a painful one, termed a '*sore subject'* by Patience. There seemed to be an acceptance that the father is absent and uninvolved and the women just have to make do under the circumstances. Patience explained:

> *"Just like a person who is injured, and their arm was cut off. It's like you are disabled…You're disabled. That's it. Deal with it".*

The survivors of gender-based violence had the added burden of recuperating from that trauma and the associated self-blame. The hurt caused by the denial and rejection from the child's alleged father resulted in one participant avoiding intimate relationships:

> *"That was how badly he had hurt me. I stayed for years without being in a relationship with anyone".*

Mothers reported pain from the helplessness of wanting the father to be present for the child, and the mothers deeming that it was *'not okay'* not to have a father. Patience said:

> *"It does hurt me; it does hurt. Sometimes, when he...not really in a bad way, it does pain me seeing my child growing up without his real father, it does affect me one-way or the other".*

For Pamela, she admitted the difficulty of being questioned by her child regarding his father:

> *"It's so difficult like when he says can I have some chocolate, and I say, "No!" I don't feel bad, because it's okay not to have chocolate, but it's not okay not to have a dad".*

Martha talked about how she thought she had dealt with the issue but when the subject of the father came up, she was overwhelmed with emotion:

> *"Then the other day when Moipone was around, and they were asking where the children's fathers are. It started. I tried to stop it. I said* [...] *must speak on my behalf".*

Some participants accustomed themselves to the circumstances. Esther asserted her coping by stating:

> *"It doesn't really affect me because I am used to this...I don't care. I have accepted".*

In terms of how the women related to their children in this situation, they reported helplessness, uncertainty and at times the unanticipated questioning about the father. There was also the hurt that the questioning caused and mothers feared being blamed by the child. Janice and Pamela reported *'overcompensation'* to make up for lack of a present father. The

shame and judgement from society, which the single mothers faced, also came up in the interviews as evidenced in the following extracts:

> Patience: "*People automatically label you* [...] *Look at her; she has a child without a father".*

> Pamela: "*Uhm, and when you tell people that you are single and pregnant, there is that look that you get and that* [gasp]*".*

Pamela talked about how she struggled to deal with the '*shame'* and *'humiliation',* which she viewed as preventing her from seeking assistance; she stated, "*I could not ask for help. I felt humiliated".* She elaborated how she had resorted to substance abuse to help her deal with her circumstances, and how this had compromised her dedication to being a good mother during the first year of her child's birth. There were societal expectations that the mothers needed to learn from having the first child out-of-wedlock, failing that, further judgements would prevail. Janice alluded to this *'shame'* as probably having contributed to her mother not telling her who her true father is. Janice stated:

> *"But I also got to understand about her teenage years, her struggles. My mom was 24 when she got me, and I am the third child, can you imagine. You are not working. You don't have anything, and it's your third child, different fathers".*

The data suggests that societal perceptions also leave the mother feeling like the scapegoat, and that it was easier for the father to place the blame on the mother for no contact between the father and the child. Pamela said, "*It's just easy to say 'Yah. She won't let me see the child' because it's a very believable story*". In Martha's case, she felt at fault for being angry at her abusive husband. In the interview, Martha mentioned:

"People now don't even believe me. They think I am wrong he is right because he is cool, calm, and I am angry and shouting. I should forgive him. You see. I do not want things to be like that".

4.4.1 Psychosocial support

Participants who spoke about the availability of psychosocial support mostly felt that it was limited. Pamela felt that there was insufficient support, and the available support was generic. She had reported that she attended *'counselling for divorced people'* which she felt was not right for her as she wanted to meet mothers in the '*same boat'* as her, so she can learn from them on how they dealt with undisclosed paternal identity.

Zelda said she felt that she had no support, and she could not share her experience with people around her as they would make her a '*laughing stock'*. The participants talked about forgiveness, forgiving the men whom they had been in a relationship with and forgiving themselves for having been in that situation of being subjects of violence or being abandoned as lone parents. Charlotte used her belief system and reliance on Christian teachings to cope with her situation. Other participants talked about the available support system with respect to family, such as assisting with dealing with the situation.

Janice actively chose the disclosure route. It is important to note that even though she chose to disclose she conceded that her career as a social worker helped to consolidate her decision and gave her the "know how." Janice reported:

"By studying social work, in a way I was able to help myself through [it] *because if it had not happened that way, it would have been a cycle* [of] *'I don't know who my father is'. Like how it happened with my mother. Her mother never spoke about her*

father. People just keep quiet, and then my mother with her children, she also kept quiet".

Patience and Pamela talked about how they came across the study while searching on the internet about women in similar circumstances as them. Pamela stated that she wanted to see how other mothers *'cope with it'*.

The mothers and guardians were asked if they perceived an impact on the children due to not knowing their biological fathers. There were two differing responses to this question; there were mothers and guardians that perceived children as being affected, and those who perceived children as not being affected. It could be said because of the limited communication regarding the absent and unknown father, mothers did not know if the child was affected or not. This failure to communicate about what is considered a sensitive matter is discussed in various studies suggesting that it cuts across the different South African groups (Bray et al., 2010; Mkhwanazi, 2009; Nduna & Sikweyiya, submitted).

Some mothers reported that the children were not affected, and that they were '*blessed*' that the children were not affected. The belief that one's child was not affected could possibly motivate non-disclosure. When Esther was asked if the issue of an undisclosed father bothered the children under her guardianship, she said: *"They are just quiet, it does not bother them".* She elucidated that as the children were growing up in an environment of absent fathers, they were least likely to be concerned about a father figure. Pamela's concern regarding the undisclosed father was more around the severance of the paternal link and the associated extended family. Two participants talked about the traditional cultural belief regarding not having your biological father's surname. Janice explained that when your personal matters are not going well people attribute it to not carrying your father's surname.

4.4.2. Socioeconomic context variation

All the women narrated about the limited finances in their household; however, the evident variance in some of the concerns voiced by the women may be attributed to their different social positioning and social contexts. Narratives from the Freedom Park area participants permeated with accounts that indicated some of the social problems within the area, and the variation in financial resources for the socioeconomic context was rather expected. The Freedom Park area participants were unemployed or employed informally, and there was a greater reliance on government grants, neighbourly and charitable assistance from non-governmental organisations operating within the area. For the two guardians that were receiving the child support grant, they felt it was not sufficient, and they were seeking ways to augment their finances through obtaining the foster-care grant. Charlotte talked about how she did not receive the grant even though her child was registered for it. Mothers (from outside the Freedom Park area) talked about wanting the fathers present for children and dismissing his financial contribution as not being of importance.

Pamela: "*It's not about money because I have never asked him for money".*

Patience: "*He can come and say, "You know what? I just want to know my son." That's it* [!] *That's all I want him to do* [...] *No financial support, I do not really care about that".*

This contrasted with the acknowledgement that the financial contribution would be helpful as conceded by Patience:

> *"Sometimes when things get really tough, and I think if he* [supposed father] *actually contributed a little bit".*

Pamela talked about how she hoped her children would be successful later in life, that way they could take care of her when she is a pensioner, as she was not saving any money for

retirement. The combination of the single parent stress and financial hardship of raising a child single-handed, produced some resentment and the mothers felt that the father could not just reappear and expect things to be done his way. Patience explained that she would give the supposed father *'a piece of her mind, first'* before she let him see her son. While Janice reported that her family could not comprehend her decision to introduce her child to the father considering that she had raised the child without the man's financial contribution.

To minimise the intense and sometimes negative emotions that may have been experienced by the participants during the interview, the closing off question was that the participant should recall a good thing about being a mother. This question yielded a variation in the experience of motherhood for the women. From the narratives of the participants from the Freedom Park area, it could be understood that there is a strain on the relationship between mother and child as was illustrated in the following dialogue:

> *Interviewer: "Can you tell me something that makes you enjoy being a mom?"*
>
> *Martha: "I sometimes wish I could go back".*
>
> *Interviewer: "What do you mean?"*
>
> *Martha: "Being a mother. No. I wish I could reverse time and not have borne these children. Being a mother is not a nice experience* [...] *I always say that if I could, I would not have been a mother".*

When Zelda was asked the same question, she responded by saying that, "*There is nothing enjoyable about being a mother".* Charlotte narrated how the child under her guardianship has an amicable relationship with her siblings but that the child is not fond of the biological mother. She elucidated this further by recalling an incident where the mother accidentally nipped the child with her nail resulting in an angry reaction from the child and had the seven-year girl old throwing stones at her mother. Not all participants in Freedom Park had negative sentiments about the maternal experience, and two guardians from the area said the

experience was '*all right'* and '*enjoyable for them'*. It was interesting how all the mothers from this area linked household chores when asked this question. It could be said that with no other support and all the burden of taking care of the household falling on the mothers they had an expectation that the children should ease their hardship by partaking in household chores. Martha stated:

> *"Lerato, she is worse. She does not want to clean then she turns around and asks for money. Where does she think I get money from? She must understand she needs to work so I can get money for her. If I work in the house for her* [implying doing housework] *who will go get the money?"*

The participants from the other socioeconomic context narrated about a positive and close relationship they shared with their children. Janice narrated on the *'wonderful relationship'* with her daughter.

In summation to the findings chapter, the intricacies of the women's lives and the varied contexts that the women came from provided rich in-depth individuated accounts of the women's experience within the investigated topic. The women also told their stories in a hermeneutical manner, as some stories were closed off and new stories recounted. Some of the themes were more pervasive than others, while other themes were more personal, yet still providing valuable insight into the phenomenon. Even though the themes were reported in a categorical manner, the life stories inter-flowed, with one aspect having an influence on another. The findings from this study will further be discussed in the ensuing chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5

The current research stemmed from emergent studies linking undisclosed paternal identity to psychological distress in children and children's expressed need to know (Langa, 2010; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011; Phaswana, 2003). The study had set out to explore the narratives of mothers and guardians who had not disclosed to their children who their true fathers are. The study's aim was to explore what some of the probable reasons for non-disclosure were, as well as to explore the psychosocial impacts perceived by the women caring for these children. In this chapter, the three overarching themes that emerged from what the participants said will be discussed against closely related literature. In an attempt to highlight the "social structuring" inherent in the women's experience the feminist ideology of recognising unequal gender relations within society provides a platform to question existing arrangements and to explore alternatives to the current societal norms.

This study suggests that maternal non-disclosure should be seen as a dynamic process and not an event. Some of the women were contemplating disclosing to their children and even though at the time of conducting the interview the children were reported as not knowing their fathers, this may change in the future. The guardians that did not know the whereabouts of fathers conveyed that to the children. Even so, this does not discount the fact that the children still did not know their fathers' identities. Overall, even when certain information was disclosed, the mothers and guardians felt that the children did not know the fathers. This view is similar to other studies (albeit from the children's perspective) where although those children knew some things about their biological fathers, they still deemed it not enough to say they fully know him (Nduna & Jewkes, 2011; Phaswana, 2003). This begs the question as

to what constitutes disclosure. One participant who 'actively disclosed' the father's identity and used to talk about the father, which culminated in the child physically meeting him and his family when she was a young adult, reported that the child still did not know her father. It could be said that since the father never made an '*effort'* to be involved in the child's life, he was still considered unknown, and the disclosure was seen as *'not complete'*.

5.1. Silence

The silence between mothers and children around absent biological fathers has been documented in numerous literature (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Mathews et al., 2011; Nduna, under review; Nduna & Sikweyiya, submitted; Terwogt et al., 2002). In these papers there seems to be various factors contributing to non-disclosure.

Firstly, in their paper about individuals presenting themselves for counselling due to not knowing their biological fathers, Terwogt and colleagues stated that at times it was difficult for mothers to talk about their former partners to their children (Terwogt et al., 2002). This paper and others highlight that sometimes the mothers may not have sufficient information on the father to adequately satisfy the child if the relationship was short lived (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006). The current findings confirm this established theme.

Secondly, when the information about the father is not conveyed to extended family members by the deceased biological mother, and when the guardians themselves do not have any further information about the father, there is a constraint to what can be communicated to the children left under the care of guardians (Nduna, under review). This was also uncovered in these findings.

Thirdly, some authors attributed some of the reasons for the mother's silence as being from her 'frustrations' with the ended relationship (Nduna, under review; Nduna & Jewkes,

2012b; Terwogt et al., 2002). Findings from the current study suggest that when the men denied or absconded when the women were still pregnant, the women reported negative effects attributed to the *'humiliation'* experienced. Literature has highlighted the issue of disputed and denied pregnancies as a factor contributing to non-disclosure. There are no published statistics on the extent to which disputed pregnancies contribute to children not being told who their fathers are but quantitative studies have documented around 30% of pregnancies as being disputed (Nduna & Jewkes, 2012a). A gendered analysis of contested pregnancies presented in Nduna and Jewkes (2012a) concluded that some men used denial of paternity as a form of 'punishment' against the girl for not having used contraceptives and prevented the pregnancy. Young mothers typically had limited access to resources to establish paternity, such as DNA testing, and this left the young women aggrieved at having to bear the brunt of being lone parents (Nduna & Jewkes, 2012a). As reported by Turney (2011) it is also undeniable that the inherent questioning of the women's morality and fidelity involved in paternity disputes is likely to leave women feeling *'hurt'* and *'betrayal'* when pregnancies are denied.

The fourth factor is that, aside from dealing with their personal duress over the ended relationship the women also had to contend with the guilt and angst of fearing being blamed by the children for their absent and unknown fathers, and this is in concordance with what Phaswana (2003) reported. Even in this current study, when paternity was overtly denied the mother was limited with what to tell the child. The non-disclosure then was seen as a ***protective mechanism*** and an attempt to shield the child from the probable pain of being renounced by the '*father* [who] *doesn't want anything to do with'* the child. These findings are similar to Nduna's (under review) work, which reported that the maternal caregivers were concerned about disclosing the identity of the father who denied paternity, as they feared it would hurt the child. There may also be the likelihood of avoiding talking about the father as

it raises a conversation with sexual nuances as reported in various studies (Bray et al., 2010; Mkhwanazi, 2009; Nduna & Sikweyiya, submitted) which may be awkward for both maternal caregivers and child as it is against the societal norm.

Fifthly, findings from this current study suggest that there were also mothers who limited father involvement and did not disclose him to the child in an attempt to negotiate better father conduct. Better father conduct was seen as men who were *'consistent'* to their paternal role and made an *'effort'* to be involved in their children's lives. The women further negated the importance of the men's financial contribution towards raising the child seemingly to bargain towards father involvement. Similar findings were evident in Sano and colleagues' study with rural maternal caregivers regarding perceptions of father involvement in low-income families. Participants in that study were not dejected by the irregular paternal financial support but rather the women were more frustrated when they perceived that the father was not fulfilling his expected parental role. Thus by excluding the men as defined by the 'maternal-gate keeping theories' from their children's lives, it was the woman's attempt to negotiate better father behaviour (Sano et al., 2008).

The last significant aspect of the findings is that despite the participants conceding to the residual hurt from their relationships, the hindrance to their disclosure was partially due to uncertainty of an appropriate manner (how and when) to disclose to the children. It was interesting to note that even though most of the women reported having *'close'* relationships with their children, there was a still a disinclination to talk about the biological fathers with the children. The mothers' discomfort with the subject of the father may have been perceptible to the children who were largely reported to '*have asked* [once] *and never asked me again'*. The women seemed uncertain regarding the *'right age'* or when the child would be *'mature'* to have information disclosed. Furthermore, there was the question of what to say

when the child asked about their biological father. Some women feared being blamed by the children for telling them things they may not want to know.

It is suggested that if the mother is forthcoming with information on the father, it is less problematic (Terwogt et al., 2002). The participant, who did disclose, reported about fielding and responding to questions in an age appropriate and honest manner as her child was growing up. In the aided reproduction field, Mac Dougall and colleagues' paper reported that once the disclosure has begun the process is ongoing and parents with donor conceived children indicated that they needed support from professionals and people in similar situations (Mac Dougall, Becker, Scheib, & Nachtigall, 2007). Another finding, which was alike to what was reported by Nduna is that subsequent partnerships, such as marriages, may hinder paternal disclosure as it may be seen as betraying the new partner (Nduna, under review). This is supported by an international study which indicated that mothers' new partners may feel threatened if the biological father is still in contact with the mother, and as a result future intimate partnerships by the mother were significantly associated with the likelihood that biological father will have no contact with his child (Tach, Mincy, & Edin, 2010).

Authors such as Chidester (1992), assert that the historical basis of South African legislation on marriage is embedded in Christian ideologies, which invariably render those not subscribing to them as "otherness''. The privileged position which marriage and consequently, marital birth hold as evidenced by legislation, offers more protection for children born within marriages, and facilitates a cultural message that is less tolerant of children born in other contexts. This assumption about acceptable births can be said to have filtered to the private domain where mothers are silent about the absent biological fathers to their children, who in this study were born out-of-wedlock. Thus, the mothers may be using the silence to protect them from the societal stigma and the negative evaluation of the

circumstances around the children's births. Some authors have described that silence can serve as a form of cultural censorship and as such, in the private setting, silence is used as a mechanism when people have to deal with experiences for which their broader cultural context has no constructive answers to in the form of a "cultural master narrative" (Tankink, 2013, p. 4). In a society where it is reported that it is more common for children to be born outside marriage than in a marital context it was still a challenge to have an open conversation on the issue within the familial context. Engaging with this topic through further research or public discourse would facilitate making issues that are perceived to belong in the private sphere more public, and facilitate the development of cultural scripts and policies that address such issues without infringing further on women and children's rights.

The ***nature of the relationship***, which refers to the degree of stability in the parents' relationship at birth and typically characterised by subsequent estrangement, can be telling on whether the father will be disclosed to the child or not. The mothers were no longer involved with the children's fathers, and the severance in the parents' intimate relationships resulted in the men being absent and not involved in the children's lives. The non-marital statuses of most of the women at the time of the children's births could suggest a fragility of the parental partnership. In categorising degrees of stability in a relationship as a method of calculating the risk of paternal non-involvement as the child grows up, it was found that children born to a married couple faced the least risk and a child born from a couple in a casual relationship had a greater risk of paternal non-involvement (Madhavan et al., 2012). Similar findings were reported in the *Birth-to-Twenty* longitudinal study conducted in Johannesburg (Richter, 2004 cited in Morrell & Richter, 2006). The findings showed that only 20% of children, whose parents were not married at the time of their births, were still in contact with their fathers, by the time they were 11 years old. In the same study, it was also reported that 26% of the 11

year olds had not been in contact with their father since birth. As research had previously not focused on undisclosed paternal identity, it is not clear whether the children did not know their fathers' identities, or that the caregivers had not disclosed this information. It could be said that these findings supported the notion of men taking up the role of being a father if it is in the context of marriage as reported in some literature (Datta, 2007; Madhavan et al., 2012; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Turney, 2011). The current norm of seeing women as caregivers means that when the parental partnership dissolves (be it marital or otherwise); it is likely that the mother will end up being responsible for the children. Moreover, this may feed into the larger proportion of children not living with their biological fathers (and possibly not knowing him).

Gender-based violence was pervasive in causing enduring rifts between the participants and the supposed fathers. O'Brien (2011) highlighted the ability of a couple to cooperate and avoid conflict after their intimate relationship has terminated as a key predictor of stable father involvement, and it can be assumed that the father's identity would not be concealed. In this study, the reported gender-based violence pointed to volatile and violent interactions during the relationship that are unlikely to be characterised by a cooperative dynamic after the parental separation. Contrary to the abuse discourse that encouraged women to leave abusive partners, in this study the men left their partners (some still pregnant) and supposed children behind after episodes of violence against the women. Some authors allude to the worrying literature which correlates domestic violence and father absence (Alvare, 2011). This aspect was apparent as three participants provided accounts of physical abuse in narratives of undisclosed paternal identity. Literature on child sexual abuse does report on the discovery of the abuse leading to marriage dissolution (Faller, 1991); and this can account for the participant who separated from her husband when she discovered the abuse. The reported

belligerent parental interaction suggested that with the fathers being absent and un-involved, it created an opportunity for the men to be unknown to the children. Furthermore, linking that to the mothers' reluctance to engage in conversations with the children about the men, and the women's experiences of gender-based violence as indicated in the findings, leave the children with inadequate information about their fathers.

In the theme ***mothers and guardians dealing with undisclosed paternal identity and absconded fathers,*** the women reported that they were *'okay',* and that they have *'dealt with it'* when they narrated about their experiences within the context of absent and unknown whereabouts of fathers. It could be that when there is limited recourse in getting paternal involvement, the women adjust to raising their children as lone parents. The younger women narrated about the perceived societal stigma of being pregnant out-of-wedlock, and how the internalised *'shame'* hindered some of the women from seeking professional intervention, which has been documented by Nash (1992). Feminist thoughts generally asserts that women who fail to meet the ideal of what constitutes a "good mother" are stigmatised for violating the norm (Roberts, 1993). A similar view is held of teenage mothers who are often seen as contributing to the 'moral decay' of society (Macleod, 2006) and it could be said as the participants were young and had not been married at the time of the pregnancy the women had perceived these societal judgements.

Insufficient psychosocial support was also uncovered in this study, and some of the women reported that they did not find available support useful as it was at times directed at people in different circumstances to them. Some women found solace in religious beliefs, and most women reported that forgiving their partners for the hurt and forgiving themselves for being in such situations helped them to *'deal with it'*. The reliance on Christian beliefs for

consolation and to aid with forgiveness has been reported by studies on absent fathers, although it is from the children's perspective (Bray et al., 2010; Gerrand & Nduna, under review). There was varied thought on whether the women perceived that the absent and undisclosed fathers had an effect on the children; while some participants perceived it was of no consequence as it was a common occurrence for children within the community to have no fathers. Statistics published by the South African Institute of Race Relations indicated that in 2010, almost half (47%) of children in South Africa had absent and living fathers (SAIRR, 2012). Although this figure does not provide a breakdown of men who may still be in touch with their children and the maternal caregivers, the data suggest a pervasive absence of male figures, which may have become accepted as a norm. Other participants were uncertain if the absent and unknown father affected their children, as the issue had not been explored in conversations with the child. The uncertainty and perceiving that the issue was immaterial to the children could facilitate a '*reluctant*' approach towards communicating with the child about the father. Some women voiced concern over the severed link with the extended paternal family, and this could be due to the disconnected social support from that side and African customary beliefs that associate success in life to having a connection to the paternal side or having the father's surname.

The lack of commitment to the children they conceive by some men is problematic. Critiques have been put forth that there is insufficient emphasis on the concept of personal responsibility for men towards their fatherly obligations resulting in the burden falling on the women, grandmothers and the State (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Makiwane et al., 2012; Seekings, 2008). Limited financial resources within the single female-headed household have been highlighted in literature and in poorer households, government subsidies may be viewed as substitute income for the (absent) male provider (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Holborn &

Eddy, 2011; Hunter, 2006; Lemke, 2003; Makiwane et al., 2012; Worell, 1986). This was further illustrated by the findings of this study. The narratives from Freedom Park described the women's reliance on government grants, neighbourly and NGO assistance. Recently released research has indicated that more than half the single women headed household surveyed were at a risk of being "financially deprived" when the women stopped working at retirement (Old Mutual, 2012). The participant who reported that taking care of children; without paternal financial support meant that there were insufficient funds to make provision for retirement savings, reflected this in this study. Some of the men were reported as having a pattern of absconding as it was stated that they had children from previous relationships whom they were not taking care of. The men seemed to have cast off their paternal roles as some of the women talked about the men being aware of their supposed children's existence but were not contributing towards the children's upbringing financially or emotionally. The women stated that they '*cannot force'* the men to take responsibility.

Men failing to take responsibility for fathering children has been documented widely (Denis & Ntsimane, 2006; Mbatha, 2012; Mkhwanazi, 2009; Morrell & Richter, 2006; Nduna & Jewkes, 2012a); however, measures to adequately address this have not transpired and this can be argued as constituting a structural injustice by the State towards women and children. In her feminist based argument, Satz's (2011) paper reiterates that personal matters such as family, gender and reproduction should be seen as part of the political domain and be subjected to principles of impartiality as families are not "natural orderings" seeing that they are reinforced by legislation. Secondly, the State has a vested interest in the well-being and optimal development of children and youth as future citizens, as well as the duty to support the equality of women. This assertion is supported by Nduna and Jewkes (2012a) who argue that by not requiring fathers be disclosed on official birth registration documentation it perpetuated a culture which accepted "fatherless" children and that having an absent and

uninvolved father is the women's personal matter. The findings of this study are in support of these contentions that unwritten norms communicated culturally end up being accepted by the women. The women themselves reported in an acquiescent manner that *'lot of homes, there were no men.* Although there is a socio-political historical basis for that occurrence, it could be said that the continued unquestioned acceptance of some societal practises can be seen as facilitating the number of children growing up not knowing their biological fathers.

5.2. Conclusion

This research provided preliminary accounts of why some mothers and guardians do not disclose to the children under their care who their true fathers are. The varied backgrounds which the women came from ensured that rich, detailed narratives were provided by the participants. Through circumstance, the women who presented themselves for this study had ended up as caregivers to children whose fathers were absent and unknown.. In dispelling some of the unsubstantiated societal views, the women were not deliberately concealing the biological fathers' identities. The non-disclosure was at times a reactionary response to the father's inconsistent commitment to their fathering role or an attempt to shield the child from the probable hurt of not being acknowledged by the father in denied pregnancies; some guardians did not know the identities of the fathers and their whereabouts. For these particular participants experiencing gender-based violence also contributed to non-disclosure of the father.

Most of the women depicted a close relationship with their children but there was a challenge in communicating with them about the fathers. It could be said, as there are no cultural scripts on how mothers should relate to children when the father has absconded or deserted the mother and child, the mothers were at a loss on what to communicate to the child. Societal

and public debates on the topic may facilitate producing the "script" as some of the mothers expressed concern with meeting and learning from women who are in similar circumstances. Undoubtedly, there are a significant number of women and children dealing with absent, unknown and undisclosed fathers, but the perceived (and real) societal judgement may hinder the women in coming forth to share their experiences in group support settings. This could be addressed through ongoing engagement with societal structures that sustain the norm.

5.3 Study strengths and limitation

The findings from this study have to be understood within the constraints and contexts that the study was conducted. However, despite the sample for this study having a limited scope of representation, the phenomenon of undisclosed paternal identity should not be seen as affecting only unwed mothers or African families from low socioeconomic contexts. As is the norm with qualitative studies, the aim is not to produce findings that can be generalised but rather produce an understanding of the phenomenon as this may be able to guide future investigations and aid in further theory development (Langdridge, 2007). Even though the intention had been to obtain participants from other socioeconomic contexts (middle and higher income), there had been a challenge in recruiting those participants. The age difference between the researcher and some of the participants may have contributed to those participants not freely sharing some aspects of their lives during the interview and this was clearly indicated by the interviews, which lasted under 30 minutes. Social desirability could have also influenced some of the participants' responses, particularly in a cultural context where people care not to be stigmatised, some experiences may have been withheld.

In assessing the rigour for qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1981 cited in Conroy, 2008) provide a guideline, and in evaluating those standards against this research the following can be said:

The *truth-value*, refers to how close the interpretations conform to what the participants said. It is acknowledged that the subjectivity inherent in analysing the data may have influenced the findings. The researcher's positioning concerning the topic was made apparent in the reflexivity section, and this can be used to evaluate how the findings may have been influenced. As there was no co-coder, aside from the supervisor who served as a second reader, there are no consistency checks in terms of availability of inter-rater consistency. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the co-coder would bring their own world-view to the interpretation and any two coders could still disagree on the findings. The findings from this study were similar to Nduna's (under review) work, and this replication can be taken as validating the findings (Langdridge, 2007). Due to the time limitation, the researcher was unable to report back to the communities and participants to member check the veracity of the findings. However, final copies of the report will be disseminated to the participants, organisations that assisted in the recruitment process and other parties that indicated an interest in the findings from the study.

For the *consistency check*, a data trail consisting of the audio recordings, transcripts, thematic analysis conducted for each transcript and for the whole data set, as well as the diagrammatic representations of the relationship between the themes are available to account for the truthfulness in the research (Conroy, 2008).

There was an attempt to preserve *rigour* in the study as the emergent themes and findings were matched against what the participants actually said, and these findings were substantiated against existent relevant literature.

5.4 Recommendations

As this was an exploratory study, the main aim had been to explore mothers and guardians' narratives for probable accounts of why they do not disclose to their children who their fathers are. Clarification and redefinition of the constructs should happen with further research conducted.

Implications for interventions

There is a need for psychological interventions to not only focus on the mother-child dyad, but interventions should also include assisting and supporting men to be involved in their children's lives in a constructive manner, irrespective of the current relationship status of the parents. More work needs to be done in addressing intra-familial violence seeing that gender-based violence was largely reported as contributing to children having absent and unknown fathers in this study.

Implications for policy

Although various family structures are acknowledged in South African legislation and that families do not necessarily consist of a mother and a father, there is a further need to legitimise and be cognisant of multiple family forms within society. More awareness could be raised in schooling systems and teachers being mindful that not all children come from homes with present (or known) fathers.

There is a definite need to vigorously strengthen available policies in supporting men to be more involved with their children to ensure men do not only conceive children but also take care of them. In her proposal for methods of preventing HIV and AIDS, Datta (2007) postulates that if men were held more financially responsible for the children they conceived, they would be more sexually responsible. Internationally, initiatives to establish paternity

when the child is born have been found beneficial in securing emotional and economic investment by unmarried non-resident fathers (O'Brien, 2011). The establishment of paternity would facilitate in possibly securing paternal assistance, be it psychosocial or monetary and alleviate the psychological and financial stress for children and their maternal caregivers. It could also facilitate a change in ideology around children born of non-marital contexts or non-normative family structures.

In districts such as Freedom Park, the temporal squatting and the high density of people in confined areas may be contributing to absent and unknown fathers. There may be a need to increase initiatives around safer sex, family planning education, and resources in such residential areas to assist in addressing unplanned pregnancies.

Implications for future research

Future investigations around the subject should try to include a diverse range of women in terms of cultural and social positioning, in order to understand more about the phenomenon from the women's perspective. Those studies would however need to constrain their participants to similar characteristics in terms of socioeconomic contexts or mothers of children of a certain age group, as issues of concerns vary widely for the women according to their context. There is also a need to match the characteristics (race, age, etc) of interviewer-interviewee. Some of the women reported that they did not perceive any impact on the child due to absent and unknown fathers not being disclosed to the children. Research could include both mother and child to further explore the experiences and the dynamics of the mother-child relationship in order to triangulate the findings. As lamented in most literature, men's perspective on their attitudes towards women and fatherhood needs to be explored. Given the high incidence of child sexual abuse and gender-based violence (including sexual assault) in South Africa, future investigations could explore the association between those

issues and absent, unknown and undisclosed fathers. There are a myriad of circumstances in which undisclosed paternal identity and maternal non-disclosure can manifest (same-sex parenting, adoption, etc.), and these circumstances were not represented in this study. Future enquiries could delve into these cases to assess the life trajectories and experiences of these individuals in the South African context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Organisation Information Sheet

Organisation Information Sheet

STUDY TOPIC: ***"Maternal Narratives"***

Good Day

My name is Livhuhani Manyatshe and I am a Masters Psychology student at the University of Witwatersrand. For academic purposes, I am conducting a research project which is focused on collecting accounts regarding mothers and guardians whose children do not know who their biological fathers are.

I am requesting your organisation's assistance in inviting and recruiting ***female*** **volunteers** for this project. The research study has been given ethical clearance by the University of Witwatersrand.

Type of Volunteers needed:

For this study I need mothers, and female guardians (aunt, grandmothers, etc), who relate to this subject and who volunteer to participate in a survey, interview and focus group. The mothers and guardians who are key to this study are those who are raising children that do not know who their biological father is.

What role will the volunteers play?

The mothers/guardians will need to commit ***an hour*** for a Focus Group and/or an Interview, and these will be ***held between May and July2012***. Both the Interviews and Focus Groups will be audio recorded and I will need the mothers/guardians to consent to this.

Respecting participants privacy

The stories will be used in such a way that no one can be identified in the final report, and all collected information will be confidential.

Other important information

As participation in this study is voluntary, there will be no remuneration for any participants and no adverse consequences for mothers and guardians who choose not to participate. Participants can choose to withdraw from the study at anytime. They may also choose not to answer questions that make them uncomfortable. No

foreseeable harm is likely to occur during the Interviews and Focus Groups, but should participants experience discomfort, provision has been made for free of charge counselling and referral services.

Participants will be required to sign a letter of informed consent to indicate that they understand the nature of the study, as well as the participation requirements. .

Presentation

I will schedule a presentation of the results as soon as the data has been analysed and a report produced (envisioned to be around November 2012), and interested stakeholders will be invited to attend.

My study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr Mzikazi Nduna, and should you wish to get hold of me or my supervisor regarding the study, our contact details are listed below.

Thanking you in advance.

Sincerely,

Livhu

Livhuhani Manyatshe (Ms)
Email: lmanyatshe@gmail.com
Mobile: 082 578 6956.

Supervisor: Dr Mzikazi Nduna
Email: Mzikazi.Nduna@wits.ac.za
Tel: 011 - 7174168

Appendix 2: Advertisement for participants

Research Participants

I am looking for mother and guardians (aunts/grandmothers, etc) to volunteer for my research study.

All ages welcome.

For more information email: whymothers@gmail.com

Alternatively send a text message to 072 142 7010. I will call you back.

Appendix 3: Survey

Survey: Maternal Narratives

This information will be kept confidential. For anonymity you do not have to provide your name. It will take less than 5 minutes to complete the survey.

Thank you.
* Required

1. Do you have any children of your own?
Yes OR No

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

2. How many children do you have?
Please fill in number below

3. What are the ages of your children?
Use semicolon ; to seperate ages

4. Are you a guardian of a child
Yes OR No

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

5. How many children are you a guardian of?
Please fill in number below

Please list the ages of the children?
Use semicolon ; to seperate ages

6. Are you interested in participating in a focus group.
Please select Yes OR No

- ◉ YES
- ○ NO

Is the Mondeor area accessible to you?
(do you live in the surrounding area Johannesburg southern suburbs?) Yes or NO

- ○ YES
- ○ NO

Please provide your email adress

7. Do you have any children under your care that do not know the identity of their father ?
(maybe as a mother or guardian you haven't told them who their biological father is, but there could be other reasons)?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

8. If you filled in YES to the Question 7 above, are you willing to have an interview with the researcher *
Please select Yes OR No

- ○ YES
- ○ NO

If you filled in YES to Question 8 above, kindly provide contact details
E-mail

If you filled in YES to Question 8 above, kindly provide cellphone contact details
Cellphone

9. What interview format will you be comfortable with
select all that apply

- ☐ Telephonic interview
- ☐ One-on-one face interview
- ☐ Written (email)
- ☐ Other:

10. Is there anyone who you know who is raising a child/ren, who may be interested in participating in this study?

- ○ YES
- ○ NO

11.If you selected YES to Question 10 above AND the person would not mind, could I get in touch with them?
kindly fill in their email or cellphone details below (prefarrebly email). OR you could forward the link to them

Submit

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Basic Demographics: Biography tool was used to obtain this information and was administered after the interview.

Main questions: What was your experience in the context of the topic of this study?

1. **Factors contributing to non-disclosure:** Whether there are specific factor(s) that the respondent feels have contributed to them not disclosing the biological father's identity. How did these contribute
    a. **Effect:** How has not disclosing affected the mother [emotionally/ psychologically/ other aspects of their life (socially/economically)
        i. who else has been affected [how]
        ii. Does she feel she has support [if yes from where/ where else she could be getting support but she is not]
2. **Mother-Child Dynamic**s: Has the child enquired about their father
    a. how does she feel about this
    b. how does the mother deal with this(the child enquiring)
    c. How she perceives the not knowing affects the child
        i. Does she plan on telling the child who the father is
            1. when
        ii. Whether the biological father knows of the child's existence?
            1. if given a choice, would the mother/guardian want their child to know who their biological father is
            2. has the biological father tried to be involved in the child's life

Closing: In closing, and to start the debriefing process the respondent will be asked, how having participated in this research made them feel. They will be asked to share their proud and positive moments as mothers. All participants will be thanked for their time.

Appendix 5: Mini Biography Tool

Date: _____ _____ **Place & Time**: _____

Language used for interview: _____

Participant:_____			**Age:**_____	
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO** Biological Mother	Age of Child/ren:			
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO** Guardian	Age of Child/ren:			
Guardian's relation to child/ren:				
☐ Aunt	☐ Grandmother (maternal)	☐ non-blood relation	☐ other:	
DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA:				
Marital Status:				
☐ Married	☐ Never Married	☐ Divorced	☐ Separated	☐ Widowed
Race:				
☐ Black	☐ White	☐ Coloured	☐ Indian	☐ Other
Education:				
☐ No schooling	☐ Primary school	☐ High school	☐ Tertiary	☐ Postgraduate
☐ Other				
Employment status				
☐ Unemployed	☐ Pensioner	☐ Housewife	☐ Employed	☐ Not working because of illness
☐ Other				
Number of people in household:		Average monthly household income:		
Is participant main breadwinner ☐ Yes ☐ No		Is participant head of household ☐ Yes ☐ No		
REASEARCH DATA:				
Mother/Guardian knows father	☐ Yes	☐ No		
Father's whereabouts known:	☐ Yes	☐ No		
Father still alive	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Don't know	
Child knows who (bio) father is	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not sure	
Mother/guardian has told child who (bio) father is	☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not sure	

Child has asked who (bio) father is young	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure ☐ Child too
Child who does not know (bio) father is	☐ biological ☐ under guardianship
Father was told of pregnancy and/or child	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet STUDY TOPIC: *"Maternal Narratives"*

Good Day

My name is Livhuhani Manyatshe and I am a Masters Psychology student at the University of Witwatersrand. For academic purposes, I am conducting an exploratory research project, which is focused on collecting accounts from mothers, and guardians who have not told their children who their biological father is.

I am inviting you to participate in the study. While this research will not directly benefit you now, it is important to understand the experiences of the mothers (and guardians) who find themselves in this situation. The study may also help in removing silence around this issue.

Type of Volunteers needed:

For this study I need mothers, and female guardians (aunt, grandmothers, etc), who relate to this subject and who volunteer to participate in a survey, interview and focus group. The mothers and guardians who are key to this study are those who are raising children that do not know who their biological father is.

What role will the volunteers play?

Volunteers participating in this study will be asked to give one hour of their time for a focus group discussion, and one hour of their time for a one-on-one interview, and these will be scheduled on different days. Not all participants will be required for the one-on-one interview. The interviews and focus groups will be ***held between May and July 2012,*** at a venue and time appropriate and agreeable for all participants. The purpose of the discussion will be to get differing views from participants around the experiences of mothers and guardians who have not disclosed the biological father's identity to their children. There is no wrong or right answer, and all contributions (from mothers and female guardians) are appreciated.

What does the research involve?

The Interviews and group discussions will be audio recorded solely to enable me to capture the data accurately. Participants can also opt to participate through written response (email) or telephonic interviews.

Respecting participants privacy

The researcher will keep all collected information in confidence. In the written report, fake names will be used in order to secure the shared information and ensure the participants' privacy. Volunteering mothers and guardians must be aware that all participants in the focus group discussions will be informed of the ethical considerations put in place to preserve the confidentiality of the information discussed in the groups. They will be requested to keep any discussions confidential outside of the focus group. While I can assure that all participants' information and input will remain confidential I cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will not share any part of the discussions with people outside of the focus groups, and I will not be held responsible for participants who fail to respect this request.

Other important information

As participation in this study is voluntary, there will be no remuneration for any participants and no adverse consequences for mothers and guardians who choose not to participate. Participants can choose to withdraw from the study at anytime. They may also choose not to answer questions that make them uncomfortable. No foreseeable harm is likely to occur during the interviews and focus groups, but should participants experience discomfort, provision has been made for free of charge counselling and referral services.

Participants will be required to sign a letter of informed consent to indicate that they understand the nature of the study and the participation requirements.

Presentation

I will schedule a presentation of the findings, and research participants and any other interested party will be invited to attend.

My study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr Mzikazi Nduna, and should you wish to get hold of me or my supervisor regarding the study, our contact details are listed below.

Thanking you in advance.

Sincerely,

Livhu

Livhuhani Manyatshe (Ms)

Email: whymothers@gmail.com

Mobile: 072 142 7010

Supervisor: Dr Mzikazi Nduna

Email: Mzikazi.Nduna@wits.ac.za

Tel:011- 717 4168

Appendix 7: Informed Consent Sheet





CONSENT FORM – In-depth Interview Participation

STUDY TOPIC: ***"Maternal Narratives"***

I _____ (name of participant) confirm that I have received the information sheet and I understand the following regarding my participation in the research study:

- I understand that the researcher has guaranteed to keep all my responses private and confidential
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am not being forced in any way
- I understand that I can withdraw at anytime, and that this decision will not affect me or my family in any negative way
- I understand that this is a research project, whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.
- I have received the telephone number of the organisation to contact should I need to speak about any issues that may arise due to the interview.
- I also give permission for the interview to be audio recorded.

I hereby accept the researcher's invitation to participate in the In-Depth Interview for the research study about undisclosed paternal identity.

_____ _____/_____/ 2012_____

Signature of Participant Date

Appendix 8: Resource List

The researcher has liaised with the listed organisation that participants who need counselling services, can obtain telephonic counselling (SADAG & Lifeline), which will be free when calling from a landline. Further referral for face-to-face counselling can also be obtained. POWA can arrange for counselling services, free of charge

Counselling & Referral Services

Please be advised that standard call rates may apply when calling from a cell phone and toll free numbers are only free when calling from a land line.

- South Africa's Depression and Anxiety Mental Health line
  SADAG
  Tel: 0800 20 50 26 (free from a landline)
  Operational hours: 8 am – 8pm

- Life Line
  Tel: 0800 150 150 (free from a landline)
  Operational hours: 24 hours

- People Opposing Women Abuse
  POWA
  Tel: 011 642 4345/6
  Operational hours: 8am- 4pm

Appendix 9: Ethical Clearance Certificate

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON MEDICAL)
H120418 Manyatshe

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER H120418**
PROJECT TITLE	Why mothers won't tell: Narratives of factors that influence maternal non-disclosure of biological paternal identity
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms I Manyatshe
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development
DATE CONSIDERED	20 April 2012
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	30 April 2014
DATE 12 July 2012	**CHAIRPERSON** (Professor T Milani)

cc: Dr M Nduna

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

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 to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

Signature **Date** 02/08/2012

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES