

**Interrogating the ‘crisis of fatherhood’: Discursive constructions of fathers amongst  
peri-urban Xhosa-speaking adolescents**

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## DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

Mass media as well as academic literature frequently refer to the high prevalence of paternal non-residence in South Africa as a ‘crisis of fatherhood’. To interrogate this apparent ‘crisis’, this study explored how Xhosa-speaking adolescents - whose voices have been predominantly ignored in fathering literature - discursively construct fathers and fathering. Using Photovoice methodology, semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews were conducted with 17 male and female adolescents. These interviews explored fathering practices, the duty of the father, and the different kinds of fathers or fathering forms available in their community. The interviews were then analysed through discourse analysis. It was found that participants drew on eight interpretive repertoires, namely: Fatherhood as a Choice, Gendered Parenting, Maternalism as Natural Parenting, Fragmented Fatherhood, Inactive Fathering, Provider and Childrearer, Essential Father Versus the Important Father, and Collective Enterprise of Fathering. What emerged from the data was a fragmented, agentic conceptualisation of the father, who was expected to embody both ‘new’ and traditional parenting to varying degrees. Fathering, as well as mothering, was constructed as being performed along gendered lines, with ‘good fathering’ taking on an overtly active form. The discourse established the father as a secondary parent to the mother, and although biological fathering was prized over social fathering, the community father - a particular kind of social father who channels paternal energy into community concerns - was valued in a similar manner to the ‘essential’ or biological father. With little or vague rationalisation given to the biological father’s ‘specialness’, the results of this study seem to indicate that the crisis of fathering is a product of a hyper-idealistic, gendered, classist conceptualisation of the nuclear family as an essential family form. The notion of the nuclear family as normative and desirable acts to limit appreciated forms of fathering to material provision, and may contribute to children feeling that they do not have a father, despite receiving adequate social fathering. Implications of these findings for future research, and for family intervention programmes in the South African context, are discussed.

Keywords: *fathering; fathers; fatherhood; South Africa; Photovoice; adolescents*

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The exceptionally high number of absent fathers in South Africa has resulted in what is known as a ‘crisis of fatherhood’. In 2005, 52% of South African children under the age of 18 were reported to live apart from their fathers (Roy, 2008), and in 2010 only 27% of black African<sup>1</sup> children were said to live with both parents (Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012). As a result of historical experiences of oppression, father absenteeism in South Africa is more prevalent among families who were marginalised during apartheid, and is therefore ‘raced’. Less than 40% of black African children live with their fathers, however 90% of white children reportedly live with their fathers (Meintjes & Hall, 2011; Spjeldnaes, Moland, Harris, & Sam, 2011).

As fathers typically spend less time with their children than mothers (Yogman, Cooley, & Kindlon, 1988), traditional parenting literature has largely ignored fathering, with Lamb noting in 1975 that fathers are the forgotten contributors of child development (as cited in Shulman & Collins, 1993). It is only since the early 1970s that an interest in the effects of fathering on children’s development has emerged. Recent studies have moved away from conceptualising the father exclusively via his biological parental contributions, and attention is being paid to the social and emotional benefits of positive fathering (Pleck, 2007).

With traditional gender hegemonic roles positioning the father as the ‘breadwinner’ and the mother as the primary caregiver, many fathers spend comparatively less time with their children than mothers (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010; Dermott, 2008). As a result of spending less time with their children, fathers may find themselves in a peculiarly self-conscious position with regard to their parenting ability, as most parents obtain parenting experience ‘on the job’. In this regard, reviews of both fathering research literature and parentcraft texts have revealed that fathers often feel less confident in their parenting abilities, or that such parental

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<sup>1</sup> Although the researcher rejects the use of racially constructed terms as discriminatory, it is nevertheless necessary to use these terms in the text insofar as they reflect the on-going social and structural divisions and inequalities that are a legacy of South Africa’s apartheid system (Alexander, 2007).

roles are not 'natural' for men, who may consequentially defer childrearing responsibility to mothers (Lamb, 1986; Lamb, 2010; Miller, 2011; Sunderland, 2000). Mothers are often portrayed within popular media as the better parent, possessing the intuition, empathy and self-sacrifice (crucial to effective parenting) which fathers lack (Edley & Wetherell, 1999). Further, McKinlay and McVittie's review of parenting literature (2008) highlights that fathers spend even less time with adolescents than they do with younger children, as a result of a number of developmental changes, including the young adult's emerging autonomy and desire to distance themselves from their caregivers.

Despite the father being regarded as a secondary caregiver (and the effects that this may have on his parenting ability), much research literature (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb 2000; Carlson & McLanahan, 2010; Clowes, Ratele, & Shefer, 2013; Dick, 2011; Lamb, 2010; Madhavan, Townsend, & Garey, 2008; Pleck, 2007; Ratele et al., 2012; Richter, 2006; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010) suggests that positive fathering is an important contributor to normal developmental outcomes in children. In his assessment of recent fathering research, Morrell (2005) attests that a nurturing, close paternal relationship has been shown to have positive effects for both father and child, including lower rates of depression among fathers, and increased confidence in children. Similarly, in his theoretical review of the effect of father involvement on child outcomes, Pleck (2007) noted a bi-directional relationship in father-child relations, whereby positive child outcomes elicit positive fathering behaviours. An 'involved father' is likely to take an interest in his child/ren's education and participate in educational activities, thereby directly and indirectly presenting to his child/ren the importance of education. The presence of positive fathering practices in a child's life also contributes to the child's general psychological well-being (Flouri, Buchanan, & Bream, 2002).

The results from Dunn's (2004) meta-analysis indicate that although boys do not benefit more than girls from father involvement, the effects of poor fathering are somewhat gendered. He found that when examining research literature which focuses on father-child relations, the relationship between fathers and daughters is often overshadowed by that of fathers and sons; daughters are often neglected within fathering studies. Sharpe's (2004) meta-analysis showed that during adolescence girls are typically closer to their mothers than their fathers, and it is said that the father-daughter relationship is - most notably during puberty - characterised by a kind of uneasiness which is absent in the mother-daughter

relationship. However a father may represent men and masculinity for his daughter, and through various fathering practices he exhibits to his daughter aspects of 'maleness'. In this regard, fathers may feel a kind of two-fold ownership of their daughters, both as women and as daughters. Research has also found that a father's recognition of his daughter as a sexual person can develop her confidence and confirm her sexual identity. In his review of research which examines South African low-income housing - where father absence is common due to migrant labour - Wilson, (2006) found that for girls, father absenteeism was associated with lower self-esteem, dependence, unassertiveness, increased sexual-risk behaviours, as well as increased mistrust of men, often resulting in a diminished willingness to commit to romantic relationships.

Although boys do not have a more beneficial relationship with their fathers than girls, cross-cultural analyses have shown that fathers display more involvement in the caregiving of their sons than their daughters (Bronstein, 1988; Lamb, 1986). Boys with absent fathers have shown poorer social competence, an increased engagement in stereotypical masculine behaviours - such as aggression - as well as lower academic success in comparison with boys whose fathers are involved in their lives (Adams, Schrepf, & Milner, 1984). In examining the evidence from a number of quantitative and qualitative studies, Popenoe (1996) asserts that without fathers, young boys may engage in antisocial behaviour due to a lack of discipline, and may turn to peer groups to seek out such discipline. Furthermore, a prevalence of gender-identity confusion is noted, along with poor psychosocial adjustment and self-control. Finally, a number of reviews and analyses have revealed that the manner in which boys are fathered influences their self-image, as well as how they father later in life (Cabrera et al., 2000; Morrell, 2006; Pleck, 2010; Richter, 2006). This is known as 'generative fathering', and posits that positive fathering has a significant impact on boys, who internalise these values, and treat their own children in a similar manner (Morman & Floyd, 2006). However, in their qualitative interviews with low-income fathers, Tamis-LeMonda and McFadden (2010) found that men from a problematic or troubled fathering background often commit themselves as fathers so that their children do not endure a similar kind of suffering. Similarly, Höfner, Schadler, and Richter (2011) found in their interviews with Polish fathers that men draw on discourses which explicitly distance their parenting style from that of their fathers. With the father being a particularly seminal figure in a young boy's life, his developmental influence cannot be ignored (Madhavan et al., 2008).

It would appear that fathering research has reached a consensus of sorts in declaring that there are myriad cognitive, developmental and social benefits to having what is perceived as positive fathering behaviour in the lives of young boys and girls. However, a dichotomy has occurred in the literature with regards to whether positive fathering needs to be performed by a child's biological father, or if such parenting may be conducted by what is known as a 'social father', that is, men who do not necessarily have a biological connection to a child. Some studies argue that a child's biological father is able to provide unique and essential developmental contributions which a social father cannot (Popenoe, 1996). Other research suggests that positive child outcomes depend more on the quality of fathering, than the father per se (Morrell & Richter, 2004). Although the importance of a father within the family unit should not be discounted, the nuclear family (where both biological mother and father live with a child) has for over two decades been uncommon in most countries and is perhaps not a realistic indicator of a child's experience of paternal support (Morrell, 2006). In South Africa the nuclear family model seems to be especially irrelevant, and the manner in which contemporary South African children discursively construct the roles of both biological fathers and alternative 'social fathers' should be explored (Clowes et al., 2013).

With fathering literature predominantly focussed on the developmental contributions of positive fathering as well as the developmental deficits of paternal non-residence, very few studies have examined the manner in which children perceive, understand or construct fathers and fathering (Dermott, 2008; Madhavan et al., 2008), thus limiting our understanding of the current state of fatherhood. Research from low and middle income countries, where fatherhood may face specific challenges, is particularly lacking.

## **1.2 Research Aims**

Within the context of the particularly high rates of paternal non-residence amongst black African children in South Africa, this study is concerned with the manner in which Xhosa-speaking adolescents discursively construct fathers and fathering. Developmentally speaking, adolescents encompass higher order skills and have engaged with community as well as family issues on a grander scale than younger children, rendering this age group ideal for the purposes of this study (Gant et al., 2009; Spjeldnaes et al., 2011). In part then, this study comprised of Xhosa-speaking adolescents as this population group has been virtually ignored within broader parenting academic research. However, as this study is part of a larger

research project being conducted by the Medical Research Council, a relationship was previously established within this particular community, making this sample one of convenience as well. By critically exploring the discourses drawn on by adolescents, this study hopes to highlight how young people construct fathering roles and responsibilities as well as positive and negative fathering practices. The study also aims to interrogate largely unexplored ‘social fathering’ discourses (Dermott, 2008). Virtually no research studies employ a discourse analysis in this regard (Sunderland, 2000; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

Specifically, this study aims to identify the interpretive repertoires upon which Xhosa-speaking adolescents draw in constructing three conceptually-overlapping constructs. Firstly, the study examines the interpretive repertoires participants drawn on when constructing the roles and responsibilities of fathers. Secondly, the kinds of interpretive repertoires used to construct positive and negative paternal behaviour are identified. Finally, the study investigates which interpretive repertoires adolescents draw on when constructing the successes or inadequacies of the social father. The implications of the findings for family intervention initiatives in communities that have high rates of paternal non-residence are also considered.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

Following this brief introductory chapter, Chapter Two contextualises this study by examining the fathering research conducted within South Africa as well as internationally. Chapter Three then explains the methodology utilised in this study. Following this, Chapter Four presents the study’s key findings. Finally, Chapter Five provides a summary of the findings, a discussion of the study’s limitations, and offers recommendations for future research and practice.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although the occurrence of fatherhood studies is relatively recent, a growing body of literature has examined the manner in which fathers reflectively construct and understand fathering and fatherhood. The methodologies of these studies include interviews, case studies, focus groups, and meta-analyses (Clowes et al., 2013; Miller, 2011; Ratele et al., 2012; Roy, 2004; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006).

As a means of contextualising the present study, this chapter offers a review of the psychological literature on fathering and fatherhood. The first section examines that which is being called a ‘crisis of fathering’ in both mass media as well as academic literature on the topic. The second section assesses the role of non-biological father figures in the lives of children. The third section explores the position into which South Africa’s somewhat unique history has placed fathers in this country. The chapter’s penultimate section reviews studies which examine children’s perceptions of fathers and fathering. Finally, a summary of the literature review is provided.

#### **2.1 Fathering Today: A State of Crisis?**

‘Gender’ refers to what it means to be masculine or feminine at any given time in a particular social or cultural context, and is a core construct in the constitution of an individual’s identity (Höfner et al., 2011; Miller, 2011). In this sense there is no female or male essence, but rather a common basis underlying the female or male experience, with various versions of gender competing for dominance (Langa, 2008; Young, 1980). Gender is therefore not something one has or is, rather it is a performance, and is something that one does (Sunderland, 2000). It follows then that masculinity does not refer to a type of man, but rather to a way in which men position themselves - and are themselves positioned - through discourse (Roy & Dyson, 2010). Fathering is intrinsically connected to masculinity; fathers are men with an identity, and a father’s maleness will influence the behaviour that he practices with his child, resulting in a masculine contribution to his child’s development (Morrell, 2006; Pleck, 2010). Having sexual intercourse is often constructed as an affirmation of one’s masculinity. A child may therefore be regarded as a material declaration of an individual’s masculinity. It has been argued that for African men, procreation is considered a sacred duty and not bearing a child

may hint at infertility, a status which is regarded as humiliating and emasculating (Bame Nsamenang, 2010; Langa, 2008). Masculine identity is therefore intricately woven into a father's identity.

With many societies structured in such a way that men - despite equal pay legislation - earn more than women, economically providing for one's family has become a fundamental aspect of traditional masculine gender identity (Richter, 2006; Sharpe, 1994). It is against the backdrop of prevailing hegemonic masculinity that a good man (that is, a good father) has been constructed as one who is able to provide financially for his family (Richter & Smith, 2006). Through life history interviews with 77 low-income non-residential fathers in the United States, Roy (2004) found that expectations surrounding the father's role as a provider can both motivate and discourage involved fathering, and therefore structure a father's interaction with his children (Shulman & Collins, 1993). If fathers are not conceptualised beyond their ability to provide income for their families, it may become understood that they are easily replaced, and in this regard can become devoid of parental responsibility (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001).

In another study which draws on life history interviews conducted with 75 low-income African American men, Roy and Dyson (2010) highlight that men from low socioeconomic backgrounds feel great pressure to provide for their families. Despite this, the current global economic crisis renders the father's traditional 'provider' role increasingly difficult to maintain, especially for men of lower socioeconomic status (Roy, 2004). By drawing on a life course perspective, Roy (2008) examined the lived experiences and effects of social structures on low-income fathers from both the United States and South Africa. He found that when adequate resources are scarce, fathers felt tremendous pressure to simultaneously fulfil the roles of both provider and caregiver. Indeed, a number of studies have argued that men's inability to fulfil the provider role has resulted in a kind of crisis in masculinity (Höfner et al., 2011; Miller, 2011; Morrell & Richter, 2006). Kirkman, Rosenthal, and Feldman (2001) conducted a discourse analysis with 19 Australian families in an attempt to understand how fathers communicate with their children about sexuality. They found that fathers experienced a conflict when performing masculinity, which was related to taking on 'new' or involved fathering. If a father is unable to provide for his family and fulfil the role of breadwinner, reviews of fatherhood research have shown that he is likely to experience fatherhood as unrewarding and may distance himself from his children, becoming frustrated and potentially

absent in fathering duties as a means of escaping feelings of shame (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). In another, somewhat dated, analysis of fathering research literature, unemployed fathers were shown to have deteriorated mental and physical health, anxiety around their low social status, negative feelings about the future, feelings of depression, and an increased likelihood of engaging with substance abuse (Ray & McLoyd, 1986). Exacerbating much of this is the fact that unemployment can decrease the attractiveness of a father to his child, or rather the high esteem in which children may regard their father, thereby damaging this relationship (Miller, 2011; Morrell, 2006). As dictated by the availability hypothesis, when a family is financially secure, the father is able to assume the role of a caring, engaged and loving parent. However, as providing is usually the highest priority for fathers, Richter (2006) concludes her analysis of research which examines the importance of fathers in children's lives by stating that men of low socioeconomic status often become physically, emotionally, and (as a result of mounting pressure) financially absent. The low-income father may have to spend a lot of time working to provide for his family, and as a result cannot spend time with his children (Dermott, 2008). While middle class men are able to fulfil the traditional role of provider in a manner which is rarely disturbed by material constraints, fathering among men of lower socioeconomic status is greatly affected by such constraints. Morrell (2006) draws from interviews conducted with South African fathers - as well as some South African fiction - in order to indicate that because fathers who earn a low income have a limited ability to fulfil traditional fathering roles, such as protecting and providing for their families (which are intrinsically linked to hegemonic masculinity), many of these men begin to feel emasculated. With the low-income father struggling to take up the traditional role of provider, he may come to feel that he has failed as both a parent and a man (Miller, 2011).

As a result of essentialist discourse proposing that anatomy dictates a parent's destiny, childrearing - or the role of primary carer - has traditionally been assigned to the biological mother (Miller, 2011; Morrell, 2006). Indeed, Höfner and colleagues (2011) found that Austrian fathers drew on a discourse which alluded to a mother's anatomical make-up as a means of justifying her role as the primary or more important caregiver. Such discourse delimits both male and female parenting, whereby the latter is restricted while the former remains relatively fluid. Fathering is therefore positioned as an optional parental endeavour for men, where mothering is constructed as ordained (Dermott, 2008). However, largely due to women's increased participation in working life (Maříková, 2005; Sullivan, 2000), as well as other family members' social mobility, independence and personal achievements (Bame

Nsamenang, 2010), contemporary understandings of fathering have become somewhat more fluid and the role of the father is less certain. Recent times have seen the rise of the notion of the 'new father' who embraces gender equity within family and relationship contexts (Morrell 2005). For this new father - an ideal noted across socioeconomic contexts (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010) - child caring extends beyond traditional fathering roles, such as the disciplinarian or the provider, and includes an emotional component of caring (Datta, 2007; Dick, 2011; Maříková, 2005). In an attempt to explore men's conceptualisations of the 'father' and 'worker' roles, Dermott (2008) conducted a thematic analysis of in depth interviews with 25 British men. The results found that fathers were expected to be openly emotionally expressive. The 'good father' therefore needed to be candid with his embrace of 'new' fatherhood. In a discourse analysis conducted with a sample of 29 South African men, Ratele and colleagues (2012) found that emotionally expressive 'new fathers' dominated participants' discourses on positive fathering. Bronstein (1988) notes that if fathers are unable to incorporate caring and nurturing into their masculine identity, such qualities will not be transferred to their children (Ray & McLoyd, 1986). With the encouragement of men to take on a nurturing role, it may be argued that childrearing today has taken on a more egalitarian form.

However, the culture of the 'new father' - despite the concept being in circulation - does not seem to match the conduct of contemporary fathering, and is said to be either an artificial invention by mass media, a marketing device, or one of many hegemonic male identities, rather than a genuine cultural trend (Edley & Wetherell, 1999; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Sharpe, 1994; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Indeed, Frascarolo, Zaouche-Gaudron, Rouyer, and Favez (2005) found in their discourse analysis of 13 semi-structured interviews from first-time Swiss fathers that many men relied strongly on verbs when discursively constructing fatherhood, thereby stressing the action orientation of fathering, and distancing paternity from the emotional care constructed around motherhood. From Mkhize's (2006) socio-cultural analysis of fatherhood studies and practices in Africa, as well as Ratele and colleagues' (2012) discourse analysis of qualitative interviews with 29 South African adult men, it was found that traditional views of fatherhood continue to dominate fathering practices. Many fathers still construct their identity around their ability to provide financially for their families, and are reluctant to explicitly express emotional states. Mothers are expected to carry out most of the childcare, whereas men may be able to pick and choose parenting roles (Miller, 2011). This is confirmed in Sunderland's (2002) study which found that the

overarching discourse upon which parentcraft texts drew is that of ‘part-time father/mother as main parent’. It has also been argued that the father’s role as a provider is so embedded within his identity that it has become assumed and therefore muted within much discourse. Therefore, that which the father is able to provide beyond finances (that is, ‘new fathering’) forms the central focus of much popular discourse (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Dermott (2008) insists that the new father is a middle class phenomenon, as traditional working class masculinity is still strongly linked with financial provision due to economic necessity pushing parents to take up traditional parenting forms. Despite expectations to the contrary, it has been argued that a father’s parenting role is not linked to any kind of emotional expression, rather, he focuses generally on practical aspects of parenting such as discipline, financial provision or ‘upkeep’, as well as serving as a family ambassador for outside relations (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008).

In examining case studies of adult men’s experiences of being fathered in the United States, Dick (2011) found that men who have recently become fathers generally want to be involved in their children’s lives, as advocated by the new father zeitgeist; however they are not willing to embrace this role by forsaking traditional fathering. Similarly, in conducting structured interviews with 40 Australian heterosexual couples in an attempt to explore men’s post-natal mental health, Bolzan, Gale, and Dudley’s (2004) discourse analysis revealed that fathers want to be more involved with their children, however they find that the gender-related expectation to provide financially for their families limits their childcare options. It would appear that the early, or traditional, fathering ideals have remained intact, and have not been superseded by what is termed the ‘new father’. The two competing fathering ideals, new and old, have consequentially resulted in a kind of tension for some men. As a means of managing this apparent tension or dilemma, many people separate the principle of new fathering from actual fathering practices (Miller, 2011; Morrell, 2006), and liberal ideals are reworked into a kind of legitimising rhetoric (Edley & Wetherell, 1999). In their discourse analysis of Australian fathers, Kirkman and colleagues (2001) found that interpretive repertoires concerning both the new and traditional father co-existed, as fathers felt that they could not abandon the breadwinner masculine ideal, however they constructed a pressure around simultaneously embracing new fathering. Datta (2007) found in his analysis of the discourse on which fathers from Botswana drew, that men appeared to strongly advocate both new and traditional fathering ideals. Perhaps rather than classifying fathers as ‘new’ or

‘traditional’, these notions should be considered as cultural ideals which dictate what fathering should be (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008).

Men’s views on fathering are largely governed by the social expectations surrounding this role. Contemporary fatherhood does not encompass a universal role, but rather a number of roles specific to a father’s particular contextual, historical and sub-cultural group (Lamb, 2010). Indeed, as revealed by the Fatherhood Project (an on-going South African research and advocacy intervention which promotes fathering, and discusses positive fathering practices and fatherlessness within communities), many fathers feel constrained by stereotypes that present them as unemotional and inexpressive, making difficult the explicit affirmation of love for their children (Morrell & Richter, 2004). Interviews with fathers conducted by Clowes and colleagues (2013) as well as Summers and associates (2006) found that despite numerous fathers desiring to be a kind of bedrock of support for their children, such support primarily refers to finances, with emotional, educational and security spheres of fathering forming secondary duties to that of providing. In this sense, fathers may wish to be role models for their children and often express the desire to make up for their own abusive and/or uninvolved fathers. A number of discourses act to stagnate social expectations of fathering, regardless of many men wishing to break free of such expectations (Miller, 2011).

It has been argued that the dominant discourse on fathers and fathering is negative, with constructions pertaining to absence, irresponsibility and untrustworthiness (Morrell, 2006). A dichotomy has been noted in such discourses, where fathers either take on the role of ‘good dad’ or ‘bad dad’. Despite the positive contributions which fathers are able to make being highlighted more than ever before, popular media continually focuses on the ‘deadbeat dad’, that is, a father who has little human or social capital investments in his children or is unskilled in childcare; a father who is not there (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Further, the low-income father is portrayed in an even more negative light, and is constructed in much popular discourse as one who does not care for his family (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Morman & Floyd, 2006). Discourse of this nature poses the considerable risk of setting up a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’, whereby fathers take up traditional hegemonic roles of masculinity, and may feel unsure of their parenting capabilities (Khunou, 2006; Montgomery, Hosegooda, Buszaa, & Timæus, 2006). Without shifting blame from genuinely irresponsible fathers, it is important to explore alternative constructions and understandings of fatherhood which are able to deconstruct negative and damaging portrayals of the ‘bad dad’ (Miller,

2011). Part of this agenda includes considering the role of non-biological fathers, which is discussed in the following section.

## **2.2 The Role of Non-Biological Father-Figures**

A significant difference may be noted between the terms *fathering* and *fatherhood*, with the former referring to the individual parental practices that men perform. *Fathering* then does not necessarily need to be carried out by a child's biological father. *Fatherhood* may be considered a constructed category which pertains to the wider social context in which fathering is performed, and relates to the public meaning associated with being a father. Again, men do not need to be biological fathers to embrace fatherhood (Dermott, 2008; Morrell, 2006). Fatherhood is perhaps best understood as a social construction in flux, meaning that as cultural expectations change, so do meanings of fatherhood (Miller, 2011; Morman & Floyd, 2006). Fatherhood is usually intertwined with a particular discourse which makes available images and descriptions such as the 'good' or involved father, and is attached to a fragmented set of understandings which reflect particular social contexts, and help to shape a father's identity (Khunou, 2006; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Pleck, 2010).

In presenting a systematic, exhaustive literature review, Popenoe (1996) argues that a biological father is absolutely crucial for positive child development. He states that men who do not have a biological connection to a child will display low levels of involvement in that child's life, will not be motivated to develop rapport with their children, and will ultimately disengage with them. Simply put, the author insists that children cannot reap the benefits of the relationship that they have with their biological fathers with anyone else, rendering fatherlessness a 'social disaster' which places children at a psychological disadvantage. Pleck (2010) has deemed such thinking 'The Essential Father Hypothesis', whereby biological fathers make a unique contribution to child development that cannot be replicated by anyone else. Indeed, Floyd and Morman's study (2001 as cited in Morman & Floyd, 2006), which utilised the theory of discriminative parental solicitude with 192 biological and non-biological father-son pairs, attests that fathers are more affectionate with their biological sons than they are with their non-biological sons. Anderson, Kaplan, Lam, and Lancaster (1999) take a somewhat more evolutionary view in this regard, proclaiming that men receive direct genetic benefits from investing in their biological offspring, and women are more likely to prefer men who invest a lot into a relationship with their own children. Popenoe (1996) states

that although it is a somewhat unrealistic ideal, families should strive toward the nuclear family model, which is vital for the positive development of both boys and girls. Despite the benefits of having a father figure, Ratele and colleagues (2012) found in their discourse analysis of interviews conducted with 29 adult South African men that there is no essential need for a biological father in a child's life. Rather, this may be an ideal propounded by dominant Western discourses around fathering. Indeed, infants are able to form strong attachment relationships with adults to whom they are not biologically connected (Pleck, 2007), and positive child outcomes have been shown to be associated with parental warmth and closeness, regardless of the parent's gender (Miller, 2011). Further, many of the benefits of positive fathering may also lie within the context of co-parenthood, with both fathers and mothers offering children unique developmental benefits, while the practical and emotional demands on single parents make it more difficult for them to meet all of their children's needs (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). A co-parent is able to assist financially and help buffer economic stressors. When childrearing is carried out by two parents, they are able to support one another as well as ensure that children have a number of different influences and social networks on which to draw (Lamb, 2010). In a set of studies conducted in the United States, Wainright and Patterson (2006, 2008, as cited in Pleck, 2010) sampled adolescents from mother-father homes, and mother-mother homes. They examined levels of self-esteem, depression, autonomy and grade point average among the adolescents, noting no difference between the two kinds of families. They concluded that perhaps it is not a father that is needed, but rather two parents and the benefits derived from this kind of family structure. Perhaps then children do not yearn for their fathers so much as what is considered to be the completion of a family (Datta, 2007).

It has been argued that it is not the gender of a parent that matters, rather, it is his or her parental characteristics, meaning that the father as a parent rather than as a male is significant (Lamb, 2010). In considering both fatherhood and masculinity, Pleck (2010) poses 'The Important Father Hypothesis', whereby positive fathering behaviour (which may be performed by any male adult) promotes positive child outcomes. The author maintains that although fathers are important to child development, they are not essential, and occupy a kind of 'middle ground' in this sense. Further, Morrell (2006) argues that the developmental essentiality of the father is a discourse drawn on to pursue anti-feminist campaigns. This discourse reduces the autonomy of the mother in an effort to ensure her dependence on the

father. Effective fathering is therefore not linked to any kind of gendered performance, but rather to what men are able to offer as a parent (Lamb, 2010).

It would seem that mere 'father presence' is not enough to ensure positive child outcomes. Although the presence of a father increases the likelihood that families are financially secure and improves their access to community resources (due to the status that men hold), it is possibly not the father per se that a child needs, but rather the social position, finances and labour provided by men (Miller, 2011). Indeed, families are usually in a better financial position when a father is present due to men very often earning more than women (despite legislative procedures which aim to prevent this) as well as the possibility of a dual income (Buchanan & Flouri, 2002). In a review of the research literature regarding the importance of fathers, Richter (2006) shows that the success of fathering is in no way hinged on such practices carried out by a child's biological father. In a similar - albeit somewhat dated - analysis of the literature, Adams and colleagues (1984) highlight the socially constructed nature of the 'Essential Father' by insisting that the effects of father absence are classed, having a greater effect on middle class families, who may cling to the ideal of a nuclear family. The authors argue that unconventional or non-nuclear family structures are more common among lower socio-economic status communities, who may not aspire as strongly to the nuclear family ideal, and therefore father absence has less of an effect. The aforementioned Fatherhood Project has shown that love, reliability, availability and support are more important for a child's development than a biological connection, which does not ensure successful fathering (Morrell 2005; Morrell & Richter, 2004). With some sub-groups of father-absent children displaying better outcomes than father-present children, it seems that having a resident male parent does not have an overall effect, rather it is the type of fathering that takes place which determines a child's developmental outcome (Dermott, 2008; Pleck, 2010).

Men who take on fathering duties of children to whom they are not related are known as 'social fathers', and can fulfil an immensely meaningful role in the lives of children (Sullivan, 2000). Children need not feel a sense of loss of an unsupportive father, but may feel content with any number of social fathers in their lives, thereby improving their resilience as well as acknowledging the multitude of positive forces which aid their developmental outcomes (Pleck, 2010; Ratele et al., 2012). Bame Nsamenang (2010) states that in many African societies, 'illegitimate children' do not exist in the Western

understanding, as a number of cultural scripts render social fathers an acceptable form of fathering. Indeed, in 2006, Richter and Smith interviewed 80 South African children and found that each one had identified someone as his or her father, who was not necessarily a biological father. Bame Nsamenang (2010) maintains that the social father has rendered the 'fatherless child' an impossibility, and the person that plays the real paternal role in a child's life is not necessarily his or her biological father. He argues that for many Africans, childcare is not a parental prerogative, but rather a collective enterprise, with siblings, close friends and extended family all participating in childcare. With father absence being such a globally prevalent phenomenon, the role of the social father should be prioritised in both research and policy (Sullivan, 2000), yet it remains largely unexplored (Dermott, 2008).

The social father is becoming increasingly important in South Africa, where the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS often renders the designation of parental roles a social rather than biological process, with childcare frequently undertaken by a multitude of individuals. Indeed, it has been shown that South African men retrospectively identify a number of adult men - to whom they have no biological connection - as playing an important role in their upbringing (Clowes et al., 2013). Legislative policy in South Africa has begun to acknowledge the importance of social fathers, seen most notably in the 1998 Maintenance Act No.99, which states that non-biological care-givers can claim child maintenance. Since 2002, 90.3% of maintenance claims have been from mothers, 1.7% from fathers and 9.5% from 'other care-givers' (Khunou, 2006). However despite the social father's apparent importance in the lives of South African children, he remains a critically unexplored subject within the research literature concerning fathering (Ratele et al., 2012).

There is however a risk in asserting that social fathers are able to replace biological fathers. By declaring that social fathers are an acceptable substitute for biological fathers - while keeping in mind that father absenteeism is much higher in areas of low socioeconomic standing - father absenteeism may become an accepted norm for poor but not high resource communities (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Despite this, social fathers fulfil an important role in the lives of many children (Dermott, 2008).

It seems that social fathering is often overlooked, in both academic literature as well as public discourse, because dominant fathering discourse essentialises the biological father - embedded within the nuclear family - as fundamental for a child's development

(Montgomery et al., 2006). One cannot infer that if a child's father is absent he or she will not grow up normatively, and one cannot make inferences about individuals because of group heterogeneity. A father's absence is harmful because economic, emotional and social roles go unfulfilled (Lamb, 1986), and men without any kind of biological link may be able to fill such roles in children's lives. Indeed, in a longitudinal study which examined 25 families in the United Kingdom, Golombok and colleagues (1995 as cited in Dermott, 2008) found no difference in the quality of parent-child relations in donor insemination children and children who were naturally conceived. It would then seem crucial to, firstly, develop a better understanding of the role of the social father in the lives of South African children, whose experience of father absence - or rather paternal non-residence (Lamb, 2010) - has become the norm rather than the exception (Ratele et al., 2012), and secondly, to explore how biological paternal relations are discursively constructed within adolescents' accounts of fatherhood, and what functions this may serve (Dermott, 2008).

### **2.3 Constructing the South African Father**

More than any other African region, a considerable body of research concerning fathers and fatherhood has begun to emerge from South Africa (Bame Nsamenang, 2010). Morman and Floyd (2006) note that it is crucial for fatherhood studies to look at the demography of fatherhood, that is, the settings or contexts in which fathers operate, rather than simply examining the biological father, or father-child relations, as is the tendency of much early fathering research (Lamb, 2010). Within South Africa, contextual issues such as unemployment (which affects a quarter of the country's population) and poverty are critical in this regard (Clowes et al., 2013). A residual effect of apartheid is that unemployment and, consequently, poverty predominantly affect black men, whose fathering capabilities and ability to provide become undermined (Montgomery et al., 2006). It has been established through interviewing low-income fathers that many men cannot tolerate the humiliation of being unable to provide for their families, feeling that they have failed as men, and as a result may assume a 'cool pose', choosing to maintain a social distance from their families (Roy & Dyson, 2010). Thus, it is argued that the shame of feeling like a bad father drives men away from their children (Morrell, 2006), and as a result fatherhood in South Africa is commonly linked to paternal non-residence (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011). Being unable to fulfil their gender roles in this regard may motivate men to assert their masculinity via alternative, and sometimes destructive, means (Roy, 2008). In South Africa, such alternative forms of

masculine expression include *indlavinis*, a Nguni word for a kind of male-identification characterised by violence, recklessness and disrespect, as well as *utotsi*, referring to a street-wise criminal who exhibits oppositional thinking. Both *indlavinis* and *utotsi* represent a masculine attempt to reclaim the gender roles diminished by a number of socioeconomic challenges. Although an image of the good father does exist, economic marginalisation has undermined people's ability to privilege such discourse (Mkhize, 2006), and it has been argued that a language needs to be developed which addresses the unrealistic expectations surrounding fatherhood (Montgomery et al., 2006).

During apartheid, the emergence of the gold and mining industries in South Africa was particularly influential in shaping family life. The state imposed taxes on black Africans in rural areas so that they would seek jobs in cities (Roy, 2008). By creating a culture of migrant labour, family life was interrupted as African fathers would spend most of their time away from their families, sometimes seeing them just once a year (Morrell & Richter, 2004). One of the most significant legacies of the migrant labour system is the entrenching of gender roles in African society, whereby taking care of finances was designated to fathers, and childrearing to mothers (Montgomery et al., 2006). The Group Areas Act of 1954 did even more to disrupt African families, when whole communities were forcibly removed. African men could work in cities on one year contracts, and were prohibited from bringing their families with them. Pass laws and job reservation ensured that black African men had little chance to live with their families, and it has been argued that these apartheid measures served to emasculate black African fathers (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011). Although apartheid legislation was repealed in 1990, its effects are noted today in rapid urbanisation, racialised poverty, entrenched gender roles, as well as fragmented family structures among black Africans (Anderson et al., 1999).

With Shulman and Collins (1993) asserting that different types of families structure fatherhood in different ways, it would seem then that current perceptions of the black South African father have been shaped by a very particular history, whereby his ability to provide has become a kind of litmus test of his fathering capabilities (Clowes et al., 2013). South Africa has had a long history of father absenteeism, and as a result many children are subjected to a sequence of caregivers. It is common practice for single-parent households to be headed by the mother (Nixon, Greene, & Hogan, 2012), with only 3% of South African children living exclusively with their fathers (Meintjes & Hall, 2011). It was found that

blaming discourse was frequently drawn on by black South African fathers when retrospectively considering their parenting experiences with South African men, who are commonly regarded as objects of suspicion (Ratele et al., 2012). However it cannot be assumed that in all cases a father's physical absence results in his psychological and emotional absence (Dermott, 2008; Lamb, 2010). Although little is known about non-residence fathers as they are difficult to contact, in their interviews with young American children, Tamis-LeMonda and McFadden (2010) found that many children make some kind of contact with their father even if he does not live with them. The disruption of fathering among black South Africans by the apartheid state was therefore pivotal in instituting what is today referred to by mass media as well as researchers, as a 'crisis in fathering'. However it remains unclear as to whether South African children experience contemporary fathering as being in a state of crisis. This reflects a broader dearth of research on children's perspectives of fathers and fathering, discussed in the following section.

#### **2.4 Children's Perceptions of Fathers and Fathering**

Compared with research which examines fathers' experiences of fathering, the relative dearth of studies concerning children's perceptions of fathering is quite striking, with very few local and international sources of data in this regard, and virtually no research exploring children's discursive constructions of fathering. An early example of a study exploring children's perceptions of fathering was conducted in the United States. It examined children's understandings of parental competency by asking a number of questions concerning the 'goodness' and 'badness' of mothers and fathers (Schvaneveldt, Fryer, & Ostler, 1970). The study sampled 41 boys and 45 girls between the ages of 3 and 5 years who each participated in a five to ten minute structured interview which consisted of five items. Each item was qualitative and aimed to explore participants' views of their parents' 'goodness' and 'badness', with the central aim of investigating whether nursery school children are willing and able to express opinions regarding both of their parents. It was found that both sexes were able to express feelings regarding their parents' competency, with 'good' parents encouraging independence and wanting their children to be happy. Some of the results were somewhat gendered, such as girls stating that fathers were 'good' if they showed affection toward them, as well as boys seeing their mothers as nurturers, whereas girls felt that their fathers occupied this role. The authors concluded that their study presented the stability of children's concepts of parental roles and the value that children attached to these roles.

However, despite claiming to examine children's perceptions of both parents, the results seemed to focus on perceptions of mothers, with an apparent implication that she is the most important care-giver. The sample also had very limited ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Furthermore, the nature of the study was limited in its exploration of the data. Children's perceptions were not interrogated, that is, the reasons that they drew on particular discourses were not explored. Added to this, the closed nature of the items focussed more on the young children's ability to express, rather than the content of such expression, thereby not sufficiently adding to parenting literature from children's perspectives.

Morman and Floyd conducted two exploratory fatherhood studies in 2006, both conducted in North America. The first asked a single open-ended question concerning what makes a good father (or rather what constitutes a good father to that individual) to 374 adult men who had fathered at least one child (Morman & Floyd, 2006). The participants were then given a sheet of paper on which to write their answer. The second, which will be given more focus here, asked 99 father-son pairs the same question, independent of one another (Morman & Floyd, 2006). The fathers were between the ages of 30 and 87 years and the sons between 12 and 59. Most of the participants were white (78.7%), 15.3% were black, and the remaining percentage were Hispanic, Native American, Asian or of 'other ethnic origins'. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted on participants' responses to the first study. This produced a 20 item list of referents. The second study was then coded along the same dimensions as the first so that comparisons could be made within dyads, as well as with results from the first study. One finding was that participants from both studies yielded the same top three categories of positive fathering, that is: love ("a good father loves his son as much as he can"), availability ("I will always be there to help if needed"), and being a good role model ("a good father is a role model in every way to his son"). In the second study, sons seemed to stress a father's granting autonomy to his children as crucial to good fathering, whereas fathers emphasised nurturing. The studies support the notion that contemporary fatherhood has moved away from the image of the father as a distant provider, and toward one that is nurturing, engaged and emotionally expressive (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). Participants were to describe aspects of fatherhood in general that they thought to be positive, rather than their own experiences of fathering. In this regard, the study was somewhat limited in exploring the reasons that specific aspects of fatherhood were valued over others, and the manner in which the top three categories of positive fathering are actually implemented by

fathers. Furthermore, in the hopes of generalising the findings, the referents found were unrelated to participants' background in any way, meaning that aspects such as race, education, and class were not considered, all of which may be said to be intricately woven into the fabric of fatherhood, and what fathering is able to achieve. The study thus seemed to neglect the context of fathering, which is crucial in understanding fatherhood (Lamb, 2010). With regard to the participants, the study did not include daughters, thereby potentially strengthening the notion that fathers do not maintain any kind of important relationship with their daughters. Finally, using college students to recruit participants may have decreased the generalisability of the results to adolescents or younger children.

A recent study conducted by Nixon and colleagues (2012) explored factors that facilitate and constrain the closeness of Irish children to their non-resident fathers. Twelve boys and 15 girls, ranging between 8 and 17 years, were asked a number of semi-structured questions, and were told to complete a 'closeness map' which visually represented how close they felt to each member of their family. It was ensured that all participants came from female-headed households before they had reached two and half years of age, meaning that non-probabilistic purposeful sampling was utilised. Interviews were transcribed and a thematic content analysis was performed. Results indicated that participants became distant in their relationship with their fathers when it was perceived that relations with their fathers were becoming hostile. Paternal closeness depended on children's perceptions of their father's commitment to the relationship as well as their perceived familiarity with their fathers. If fathers were perceived as lacking in parental effort, children became angry or disappointed with their fathers. Regular contact was perceived to mean showing commitment. Although no gender pattern emerged from the results, older children (or those who may be considered 'teenagers') were found to be more critical of their fathers than younger children, who were often satisfied with frequent contact and nothing more. The study concluded that participants were able to express a kind of agency in conceptualising their father's role as voluntary in their lives - that is, the father's ability to choose whether or not to engage in parenting - and did not feel that a biological connection indicates that he has fulfilled his role. A number of problems may however be noted with this research. The large range between participants' ages meant that they were at different developmental stages and therefore perceptions of fathering and experiences differed quite widely among the already small sample. The study also did not consider fathering relationships which children may form with men to whom they are not related, which would likely affect how they perceived their biological father (Ratele et al.,

2012). Finally, the study did not sufficiently explore the reasons that fathers were absent or the extent of their physical and emotional presence (Morrell, 2006), all of which would likely affect the results significantly.

Although much has been written about the ‘crisis of fathering’ in South Africa (Clowes et al., 2013; Madhavan et al., 2008; Morrell, 2005; Morrell & Richter, 2006; Ratele et al., 2012; Roy, 2008; ), very few local studies have explored children’s views on fathering. One such study, conducted by Spjeldnaes and colleagues (2011), examined the manner in which South African teenage boys of low socioeconomic status understood their transition to manhood, as well as how they visualised their roles as future fathers. The study was conducted in Limpopo with thirteen Sotho boys ranging between the ages of 15 and 19 years. The study took place between 2005 and 2007, with three methods of data collection: focus group discussions, photo and diary-assisted semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. Participants were instructed to write about their life in a diary every day for three weeks, as well as take photographs of people, things and places that they cared about. They were told to do this again two years later, however this time their diaries were written over six months. In total there were five focus groups, ten diaries and 30 semi-structured interviews, concerning parents, adults, health and relationships. The study was conducted in SePedi, the participants’ mother tongue. Phenomenology, which looks at how participants understand experiences or phenomena, formed the analysis. Participants claimed that they, along with their fathers, became awkward when discussing emotional issues. They also stated that mothers were unable or unqualified to discuss such matters. Being a man meant showing respect to one’s family as well as providing economically and emotionally. However being physically present was prized over financially providing, indicating the high esteem in which participants regarded paternal presence within the father-child relationship. Being a man also entailed providing paternal guidance around personal issues as well as issues pertaining to the adolescent’s own manhood. Participants claimed that they were upset when fathers skirted these responsibilities which were said to be cornerstones of fatherhood. The study has several limitations. Only male participants were used, once again diminishing the value of father-daughter relations (Wilson, 2006). It was also conducted in a rural area with a very small sample size and perhaps further exploration of contextual factors would have helped to make sense of these particular perceptions. An examination into the participants’ use of particular discourses may have also granted a greater understanding into why and how they asserted particular constructions.

Finally, Richter and Smith (2006) explored South African children's views on fathering as part of the Human Science and Research Council's Fatherhood Project, which - among other things - aims to encourage responsive fatherhood as well as to create and promote fatherhood interventions. The study was carried out in schools in KwaZulu-Natal and Soweto and utilised 40 girls and 40 boys of varying socioeconomic status, all between the ages of 10 and 12 years. An exploratory qualitative approach was utilised, whereby children were instructed to write an essay on 'my father' or answer a series of open-ended questions concerning fatherhood. Such questions included what fathers do to make children happy or unhappy, what fathers do to make mothers happy or unhappy, what fathers do to help around the house, and what constitutes a 'perfect father'. Children in the study expressed a longing for a father figure, or an idealisation of such a figure. It was found that both the 'new father' as well as traditional provider roles were valued. Time spent together, affection, caring, and involvement in housework and childcare were all characteristics which participants attributed to an ideal father. A seemingly surprising result was that participants defended or, in an attempted act of loyalty, stood by their fathers despite their fathers' unemployment, displaying some understanding of the effects that unemployment may have on a father's self-image. The study did not consider specific effects that participants' gender or socioeconomic status may have had on their responses, instead claiming that results were homogenous across social categories of this kind. However such claims may act to diminish contextual factors. Although interesting and often emotive, the study did not provide an extensive analysis of the data, preferring for the children's words to speak for themselves rather than be interpreted by the researchers. It is important to look deeper into data of this nature so that the discourses which children draw on when discussing fatherhood may be interrogated and a better understanding is developed regarding why particular beliefs around fatherhood exist.

Although conceptions of fathers by grown men have been explored extensively, it would appear that the voices and discursive constructions of children - a crucial component in understanding father-child relations - are poorly represented in the literature concerning fathering (Richter & Smith, 2006). Indeed, data relating to children's paternal relationships should come from a multitude of informants in order to avoid informant bias (Pleck, 2007). Further, almost no recent studies have considered the discursive constructions of Xhosa-speaking children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, many of whose fathers may indeed be considered 'in crisis' due to on-going economic marginalisation. Studies of this nature have, for the most part, ignored or glossed over contextual factors that are so important in

shaping children's views on fatherhood. Added to this, fathering studies seem to overlook the importance of the female voice, thereby strengthening the notion of the father-son relationship as more important than father-daughter relations.

It would seem that a dichotomy has appeared in the literature concerning South African fathering. One school of thought verifies a crisis of fatherhood and the challenges involved with being a father, while a second school of thought notes the value found in social fathers, and appears to contest the notion of a crisis. It is crucial then to examine the discourses on which children draw when constructing fathering, and to explore whether these support or challenge the idea of a South African fatherhood in crisis. By examining such discourses, children's experiences of biological and social fathers can be explored, and the differences between these two relationships, if any, interrogated. Indeed, the discourses on which South African children draw may help locate the 'crisis', provide insight into the vastly unexplored notion of young people's constructions of fatherhood, as well as offer necessary understandings into how father-child relationships can be advanced, thereby unlocking the myriad bi-directional advantages of positive fathering (Pleck, 2007).

## **2.5 Concluding Summary**

In the preceding literature review, the contemporary father - both internationally and in South Africa - was examined with regard to the apparent 'crisis' in which he finds himself. It would appear that fathering research has explored a number of important areas concerning paternal presence, the father's ability and inability to engage in emotional expression, categories and subcategories of 'good fathering', individual father-child relations, as well as the effects which the 'male' construct has on both fathers and children. Despite this, fathering research appears somewhat wanting with regard to explorations of low-income fathering, social fathers, gendered constructions of fathers, 'the father' within specific sociocultural contexts, that which paternal responsibility does and does not encompass, as well as the nature of father absence and the different forms which this may take. Finally, the much neglected study of children's perceptions of fathers and fatherhood was identified. This study hopes to address these gaps in the literature by examining Xhosa-speaking adolescents' constructions of fathers and fathering within a peri-urban context. The following chapter will elaborate on the research aims and describe the methodology employed within this study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter begins by outlining the aims and objectives of this research. Thereafter the research design is described. The study sample and setting are then explained, followed by the method of data collection and procedures. Then a section on data analysis explains how discursive psychology was used to analyse the data. The final section discusses the study's ethical considerations, including issues of informed consent, confidentiality as well as the benefits and risks of this study.

#### **3.1 Aims and Objectives**

Three types of studies have appeared in the fathering literature: those that examine the important developmental contributions which fathers are able to make, those that note the developmental deficits of paternal non-residence, and finally, those which examine the various contributions of fathers from the perspective of children (Buchanan & Flouri, 2002). There are however very few of the latter, with fatherhood studies rarely harnessing the voices of children, and virtually never employing discourse analyses in this regard. This study hopes to add to the small body of research literature which utilises the voices of children to explore notions of fathering. Children's voices are a crucial component in understanding father-child relations (Pleck, 2007; Richter & Smith, 2006; Roy & Dyson, 2010), and are immensely important when considering issues that directly affect them, as well as in the development of parenting programmes (Kessi, 2011). Adolescents have developed higher order skills and have engaged with community as well as family issues on a grander scale than younger children, rendering this age group ideal for the purposes of this study (Gant et al., 2009; Spjeldnaes et al., 2011). Exploring the manner in which children utilise particular discourses may provide an understanding into both why and how particular discursive practices are employed. The study looks at the voices of both boys and girls, as previous research in this area seems to examine the son's voice exclusively, with the implication that fathers are more pertinent parents for boys. It is hoped that this study will highlight the rich and important data that children are able to offer with regards to understanding the complexity of the South African father.

This study aims to examine how Xhosa-speaking adolescent boys and girls in a low socioeconomic peri-urban community discursively construct fathers and fatherhood. The study hopes to expand on the very small body of literature concerning children's depictions of fathering by exploring the discourses on which children draw in order to understand the role of fathers in South Africa, including what fathers are doing right and how fathering practices can be improved. More specifically, the study aims to interrogate the so-called 'crisis of fatherhood' in South Africa from the largely-ignored perspective of children. The following questions served as a guide throughout the research process:

- On what interpretive repertoires do participants draw when constructing the roles and responsibilities of fathers?
- What interpretive repertoires are used to construct positive and negative paternal behaviour?
- Upon which interpretive repertoires do adolescents draw when constructing the successes or inadequacies of the social father?

The findings of the study may help to highlight pertinent areas which family strengthening interventions and parenting interventions in communities with high levels of paternal non-residence can address. Building upon the participatory action framework of Photovoice (see section 3.4), it was also hoped that taking part in the study may evoke a sense of critical awareness and empowerment among participants, potentially energising and motivating them to take collective action toward improving local fathering practices (Strack, Lovelace, Jordan, & Holmes, 2010).

### **3.2 Research Design: A Theory-Method**

This study utilised a qualitative research design. Rather than utilising statistical data, qualitative research employs a variety of methods which focus on visual as well as linguistic discourse as a means of exploring meaning. The flexibility of qualitative techniques allow for an adequate attendance to new or unexpected data discovered during the analysis. Results are by no means preconceived, and the research approach acts more as a loose guide rather than a fixed recipe. In this regard, the open-ended nature of the qualitative research question allows it to be moulded by the analysis (Willig, 2001). This is highly important within the context of this study, which does not rely on any kind of definitive research agenda so that participants

may exercise agency in developing their constructions of fatherhood. Added to this, qualitative results promote alternative interpretations, thereby providing an on-going analysis and understanding of participants' depictions (Marecek, 2003). It would seem that most existing fatherhood studies have been of a quantitative nature, whereby the child-father relationship is pre-determined by the researcher. By utilising a qualitative framework, this study will allow children to formulate their own narrative of how they perceive their relationships with their fathers (Nixon et al., 2012).

Although discourse analysis is often considered the accompanying method to the theory of social constructionism, the two cannot be prised apart, and may be regarded as a theory-method. Discourse analysis and social constructionism offer an alternative to mainstream psychology, casting scepticism upon conventional knowledge forms and act to interrogate that which has become common-sense understanding (Foster, 2003; Olson & Worsham, 1998). The theory-method rejects notions of realism as well as essentialism, asserting the impossibility of pure - or objective - fact divorced from the dynamism of socio-political contexts, and suggests that subjective perspective forms the basis of all knowledge constructs. Indeed all data is understood as an interpretation and is regarded as provisional in this regard (Mason, 1996; Silverman, 2012). Knowledge is then situated within a specific historical and cultural period and is sustained via numerous social processes, particularly language, that is, imparting meaning by the use of signs (Burr, 1995; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008).

Social constructionism may be considered as an approach which examines how signs and images represent people and objects, and how these representations inform the experience of these people and objects (Terre Blanche, Kelly, & Durrheim, 2008). Social constructionism positions language as a precondition for thought, with all representations of the social world rooted in language. Rather than provide a direct link to an individual's thoughts, language is regarded as that which allows the existence of thought (Burr, 1995). In this sense, language constructs reality rather than reflects it, refuting the notion of an objective world. A system of meaning therefore exists at a social rather than at an individual level, with people constructing reality (Kiguwa, 2006). Social meaning is thought to be encoded within language, with social reality considered to be a language of sorts (Terre Blanche et al., 2008). However, language is not the topic of inquiry here per se, but rather the medium for consideration of another topic – fathering (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This study does not look

at language in isolation, rather, the manner in which language is utilised will be considered by examining various discourses on which participants draw (Pujol & Montenegro, 1999).

Discourses are a system of symbols which create objects, such as 'race' or 'gender', and come to represent various social practices, thereby constructing ways in which people relate to one another (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Objects like 'race' are then not considered to be an objective fact or subjective experience, but are rather understood as linguistic practices around which social life is arranged. Simply put, discourses are a widespread, socially-shared manner of speaking about different things, with their own sets of expectations and conventions. It is through discourse that cultural meanings and representations are relayed (Parker, 2002). A distinction between the subjective and the objective is then constructed, attended to, and reworked in discourse (Potter & Hepburn, 2007). People are therefore both producers and products of discourse (Edley & Wetherell, 1999).

Different discourses aim to produce a particular version of events, with a single text orientated toward a variety of goals and persuasions. As a result of this, discourses are characterised by much variability and frequent contradictions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Terre Blanche et al., 2008). Understanding the social world is then linguistically selected, with the limitations of understanding reflecting the limitations of language. Discourse analysis explores these limitations as well as how language is utilised for specific purposes (Burr, 1995; Pujol & Montenegro, 1999).

Social constructionism is not value-free, and has the political intent of aspiring toward change (Foster, 2003). Although discourse constructs knowledge, individuals are capable of critical historical reflection and are able to exercise choice with regard to the discourses which they draw on. A discourse analysis is the collection and examination of verbal material - spoken or written - which focuses on action and emphasises properties such as structure and variability. Thus an individual is said to *do* gender, rather than *be* a particular gender. Discourse analysis facilitates change as it critically examines language as a phenomenon that shapes the social world, as well as a medium through which to explore a participant's inner-world, with a focus on action rather than cognition (Burr, 1995; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). In a sentiment put forth by Potter, Wetherell, Gill, and Edwards (1990), discourse analysis illustrates how people use discourse, and how discourse uses people. By exploring knowledge-production,

discourse analysis and social constructionism aim to challenge various knowledge forms, such as how fathering discourses are conventionally received (Kiguwa, 2006).

By utilising discourse analysis as a means of analysing textual data, the study aims to promote change by exploring alternate readings of reality, as well as bringing about critical reflection - of which all people are capable - that may lead to an altered understanding and conceptualisation of fathers and how fathering has come to be conceived by children in contemporary South Africa (Burr, 1997; Willig, 2001). The analysis aims to highlight links between language use and social action, and hopes to relativise social categories which traditional psychology has seen as essential or unchanging (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Parker, 2002). The discourse analysis hopes to highlight fathering practices which can be agentially challenged, as well as to explore why fathering is perceived in particular ways by children.

### **3.3 Sample and Setting**

The study was conducted in a residential community in the Western Cape. The township is almost entirely an isiXhosa-speaking peri-urban community near to Cape Town consisting of 5500 low-cost government houses and about 1000 shack houses. Most of this township's approximate 22,601 residents - of which 8,065 are children - live below the subsistence level. The community has considerably low levels of resources as well as very high rates of unemployment, crime and violence - all of which may influence fathering practices in this area (Economic and Human Development Department, 2006; Roy, 2004; Suffla, Kaminer, & Bawa, 2012).

All participants sampled in this study are considered active agents who are able to construct their own meaning from their environment (Nixon et al., 2012). As discourse analysis is concerned with challenging a stable reality reflected in participants' talk, rather than with representativeness, participants were not randomly selected. Teachers who work at the school where the study was conducted were in charge of selecting participants whom they felt were competent in expressing themselves verbally. The study recruited two separate groups, consisting of ten boys and ten girls respectively. All participants were between the ages of 15 and 18 years. However, due to some attrition the final sample utilised in the study was eight boys and nine girls. Dividing participants on the basis of their sex aimed to reduce the time in

which group members felt comfortable expressing their views on fatherhood and to allow for the possible emergence of gendered constructions of fathering.

This population group was selected because the voices of Xhosa-speaking adolescents from low-income communities have been critically ignored within parenting academic literature. However, as this study forms part of a larger research project, a relationship had previously been established within this community, meaning that the sample was also selected on the basis of its convenience. Contact, communication and sourcing of participants were facilitated by the Medical Research Council – UNISA Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU). The school was selected due to existing links with SAPPRU. The organisation helped to obtain consent and assent from parents and children, as well as to clarify the aims of the project to all involved. Finally, as isiXhosa is the mother tongue of the participants, a translator was present throughout group discussions, photo presentations and interviews.

### **3.4 Method of Data Collection**

This study utilised Photovoice as a method of data collection. Photovoice involves providing cameras and some basic photography training to participants, providing them with a topic or ‘photo mission’ which they are to photograph and later interviewing them - individually or as a group - about their photographs. By providing cameras and training to disenfranchised members of a community who would otherwise not have access to such tools, Photovoice methodology is able to illuminate community concerns and perspectives with the hope of catalysing change (Wang, 2006). Developed in the mid-1990s to expand on the range of voices that characterise and enhance people’s social realities, Photovoice was first used as a community development tool for rural Chinese women. Today, it is employed in a variety of research settings - typically in under-serviced or marginalised communities - and allows a range of participants the opportunity for critical reflection, group discussion, developing narrative, and exploring various meanings ascribed by the individual as well as the group voice. By use of Photovoice, action and reflection occur together in the hopes of igniting a sense of advocacy within participants, who may then actively work toward improving their community (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006). Those who participate in Photovoice projects are invited to produce an alternative understanding of community life via the production of narratives. These narratives are then utilised as a means of revealing the

consciousness and emotions of respondents, whose voices typically go unheard by policy-makers (Kessi, 2011).

Photovoice is considered a participatory research method. With so much exploitative potential within the social sciences (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard, 2009), participatory action research strives to promote participants' ownership and control over the process of generating knowledge. The research relies on a partnership of sorts between community members and researchers, with each party sharing decision making as well as relying on one another's strengths and weaknesses as a means of co-learning (Strack et al., 2010). In this regard the researcher is considered to be more of a facilitator than an expert. He or she may serve as a catalyst for people to critically review a particular facet of their lives (Gray, 2004). Essential to participatory action research is the notion that people must gain a fundamental understanding of pertinent societal issues in their lives so that such issues can be addressed meaningfully. Therefore participatory action methodology considers researchers as facilitators of knowledge-creation who collaborate with participants to develop an understanding of various community concerns (Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009).

Photovoice is founded on feminist theory, documentary photography and Freirian theory (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005; Wang, 2006). Primarily, Photovoice draws on feminist theory's notion that no one is in a better position to study and understand the issues of a particular group than those who comprise that group. Such study is then conceptualised as a shared experience between researchers and participants. Indeed participants become aware of their cultural capital as they are positioned as experts of their lives, and in this sense an inversion of roles occurs where the researcher receives rather than produces knowledge. The researcher then becomes a critical commentator, and participants are able to engage in observation and reflection in a safe environment in the hope of moving toward action and facilitating change (Langa, 2008; Suffla et al., 2012). The opportunity for participants to gaze into one another's lives becomes a crucial facet of the Photovoice process in that it promotes reflection of the individual's own life, as well as what is known as 'reverse gazing' (Gillespie, 2006 as cited by Kessi, 2011), whereby the photographer realises the intrusiveness of his or her ascription of meaning to various social phenomena, and develops a particular consciousness in this sense (Kessi, 2011). Indeed, the voyeuristic gaze emphasised in photographs allows the photographer to structure his or her narrative in such a manner that

may subvert or align with various power structures and knowledge forms within a society (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008). Secondly, as the images that participants take are utilised to draw attention to social issues, Photovoice also make use of documentary photography. Finally, Photovoice makes use of Freirian theory by drawing on Paulo Freire's assumptions on education for critical consciousness. Freire urged people to reflect as well as act upon the structures which maintain various societal problems, thereby conceptualising people as active agents in understanding and changing various community issues (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Suffla et al., 2012). In this regard, community members are able to actively participate in the betterment of their lives by engaging with their social world and working to identify appropriate action (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Although Photovoice is an immensely useful methodology in a number of ways, it does have its shortfalls. Certainly, Photovoice looks to empower and engage community members in identifying, representing and changing their community through photography and dialogue. That being said, it is impossible to 'provide' participants with complete empowerment, and Photovoice acts more as step toward this end. In this regard, the Photovoice process can potentially build up people's hopes, only to later let them down (Strack et al., 2004). Added to this, as Photovoice is usually used in a community setting, it can only be implemented on a small scale, and cannot serve as a large psycho-political intervention, acting only to empower a small group of individuals who may act to change their communities in some way. However, although the influence of Photovoice may be somewhat small, it is able to reach some of the most disempowered members of a population (Suffla et al., 2012).

Since those who participate in Photovoice projects are not required to be literate or speak a specific language, the methodology is able to access some of society's most vulnerable or disenfranchised populations, such as youth (Gant et al., 2009). Despite being useful informants on issues that affect their well-being, youth are often ignored, with most research studies favouring an adult-centric approach. Indeed, in South Africa youth played a crucial role in facilitating change during apartheid (Strack et al., 2004); however the voice and agency of young people post-apartheid has not been adequately harnessed. The diminished voice of youth becomes exacerbated when living in conditions of poverty. Typical trappings of poverty such as reduced familial support, finance, transport and safety also act to limit one's opportunity for civic engagement (Wang, 2006). Providing young people with an opportunity to engage with local issues can be an important means of empowering them, and

can potentially decrease risky behaviour. Photovoice allows youth to develop personal and social identities which can be important in building social competency. The strengths and assets of young people are emphasised in this way so that they are able to respond to concerns in their community, ultimately taking action to enhance their own well-being (Suffla et al., 2012).

As a means of contextualising their work, participants may present their photographs to a group; however Photovoice may also take the form of an interview so that participants are able to feel individually heard. This study will make use of photo-elicitation interviews, which introduce photographs - taken by the interviewee - into the interview context as a way of eliciting personal accounts and illuminating aspects of his or her life. This somewhat unique style of interviewing may facilitate participants' spontaneous expression. Previous studies indicate that Photovoice participants often become eager and excited to share their insights and photo-narratives, which is not always the case with adolescent research participants (Langa, 2008). Photo-elicitation interviews trigger memory, elicit more information and evoke a more layered response than traditional interviews (Croghan et al., 2008). The photographs themselves do not represent any kind of truth or reality, rather, they are considered to be building blocks of meaning-making which locate people's priorities at a particular historical moment, and are therefore used as a medium for communication. The combination of visual as well as verbal expression allows participants the scope to explore complex, ambiguous and contradictory modes of meaning-making (Wang, 2006). It is suggested that photographs are able to penetrate a participant's consciousness more deeply than words, and can illuminate that which is invisible to the researcher but apparent to the interviewee. This is particularly useful for studies such as the present one, where the researcher is not very familiar with the participants' culture. As all forms of visual representation are likely to be strongly rooted within one's culture, the photographs may serve as an important bridge between interviewer and interviewee. Participants' accounts are likely to reflect their immediate environment, as well as their broader social and cultural context (Suffla et al., 2012). Finally, photographs may be understood as a site where a multitude of the photographer's identities are able to interact (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Photo-elicitation interviews therefore go beyond a conventional interview and attempt a potentially more meaningful and complex understanding of the lives and perspectives of interviewees (Wang & Burris, 1997).

This study also aimed to bring about a number of changes inherent within the Photovoice methodology, most crucially individual and community empowerment. Exploring children's visual depictions of their fathers may allow a kind of reflection among participants, which may not have otherwise taken place (Moletsane et al., 2009). It was hoped that via an ignited sense of advocacy and community, adolescents would be energised and motivated to take action and work toward thinking more critically about fatherhood as well as contesting hegemonic fathering discourses which may be problematic (Strack et al., 2010).

### **3.5 Procedure**

This project was conducted over a three month period. Within its early stages, administrative duties were taken on, these included: site selection, planning, and synchronising the project's timetable with that of the participants. It was also important to secure a venue to which participants had easy access and that represented safety, trust and ownership for them. It was decided that the school hall as well as a number of classrooms could be used after school hours for the interviews and group meetings, which were all digitally audio-recorded. The sessions were facilitated by the researcher as well as two co-facilitators, one being a clinical psychologist from SAPPRU. A translator was also present when necessary. Individual interviews ran for a duration of about 45 minutes each, while the group sessions ran for approximately 90 minutes. As a means of preventing an interference with participants' schooling, all meetings took place on weekday afternoons.

The first session began by orientating participants to the aims and objectives of the project. The group then discussed the kinds of topics that were appropriate to discuss during the sessions. It was stressed that clear communication is of paramount importance to the project, and participants were reminded that if they were not comfortable speaking English, they were to speak in their mother tongue as a translator was present. The voluntary nature of the project was emphasised, as well as potential risks and benefits which participants may receive throughout the study. Then, in order to obtain a general understanding of the lives of the participants - as well as their perceptions on fatherhood - a group discussion took place which focused on favourable and unfavourable fathering practices, as well as who is able to perform fathering roles. The conversation then moved on to what fatherhood meant within the participants' community.

In the second session - which took place one week after the first - participants received photography training which explained facets of the disposal camera that they were to receive later in the session. The training explained the function of various parts of the camera, how to take photographs, using the flash, as well as protecting the camera. They were also shown how to create particular 'moods' or effects with photographs. The training avoided using language that pathologises misunderstanding or photographic ignorance of any sort. Also discussed was the Photovoice philosophy of images, that is, the idea that photographs are a means of respectfully and appreciatively giving back to one's community (Wang & Burris, 1997). Various ethical concerns around photographs were also discussed, with a particular focus on secondary participants, or the people who form subjects of the photographs. Each adolescent was then given a disposal camera containing a 25 image spool, and was instructed to take one practice photograph of another group member. Finally, participants were told that they have ten days to take photographs of what being a father, or what the idea of 'a father', means to them. The session wrapped up with participants brainstorming the kinds of photographs that they might take so that they had a clearer understanding of what is required of them (Wang, 2006). After ten days the cameras were collected from the participants and the spools were developed.

In preparation for the photo-elicitation interviews, the third session commenced with a fairly short discussion where participants spoke about the process of taking photographs, what they had enjoyed and what they had found difficult. After this, each participant was given his or her developed photographs. Participants were then asked to give each photograph a descriptive title, or label. Each participant then selected five of their photographs which they felt best represent 'the father' or 'fathering' in their community. At a series of subsequent sessions, participants were then interviewed in pairs about their five selected photographs. Paired interviews were utilised as a means of reducing potential tension or anxiety within the interview environment; however each adolescent in the pair was asked questions separately. These questions pertained to his or her photographs exclusively. Semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews (see Appendix C) were utilised as a means of obtaining the meaning, content, and purpose of each photograph, and concluded only when participants had discussed each of the five photographs which they had chosen (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Each interview lasted about 45 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed in detail at a later stage.

As a means of obtaining collective constructions of fatherhood as well as contextualising everyone's work, in the fourth session participants discussed common themes or issues arising from their photographs (Langa, 2010). This was done by allowing each participant five minutes to present his or her five favourite photographs to the group. Participants were further probed by the facilitators by use of SHOWeD, a series of questions designed to explore photographs further. SHOWeD questions include: What do you See here? What is really Happening here? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this problem, concern, or strength exist? and finally, What can we Do about it? (Strack et al., 2010). The SHOWeD questions aim to address the ways in which participants feel that they could improve fathering practices, what they feel still needs to be done in this area, as well as what is currently being done satisfactorily. After the individual presentations, participants were given ten minutes to discuss the photographs collectively and identify common themes across their presentations. They were then told to see if they could recognise three features, ranked in importance, of a 'good' father and three of a 'bad' father, which came up in the photographs. After this they discussed how they have changed, if at all, from the first session, as well as how different themes or issues which they have identified can be addressed. The purpose of this discussion was to reflect on the images, and in the process inspire participants to take action as well as gain confidence (Wang & Burris, 1997). Participants were then asked to discuss and provide feedback on the Photovoice process.

Finally, participants held a small photographic exhibition in the school hall where they each showed teachers, parents and members of the community three of their photographs, which had been framed by the research team. Participants designed invitations to the exhibition which they handed out to teachers, parents and members of the community. Their three photographs were enlarged and accompanied by captions given by the participants themselves. The exhibition stayed up for three days, after which participants took home their three framed photographs. As this research was part of an on-going study with these participants, a number of meetings were held with the participants over the following months to discuss issues which they felt were pertinent in their lives. They were also involved in the production and public screening of a short film which explored teenage pregnancy in their community.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The study's data corpus comprised of the accounts collected in the interview sessions. Photographs were not themselves visually analysed, as this would have been beyond the scope of the dissertation, however they are used in this report to illustrate the discursive constructions identified in the narratives.

Situated within a social constructionist paradigm, this study utilised discourse analysis. The method of discourse analysis proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) - later dubbed 'discursive psychology' by Edwards and Potter (1992) as a means of differentiating the method from the various other discourse analyses used across the social sciences - conceptualises discourse as a means of constructing reality. Discursive psychology utilises discursive techniques to analyse talk, and applies these analyses to real world settings (Potter & Hepburn, 2007). Potter and Wetherell (1987) note that the three characteristics of discourse are: variability, construction and function. An individual's attitudes are therefore not considered to be stable characteristics, but rather evaluative expressions which are features of his or her discursive practice (Parker, 2002). Therefore, the social psychologist need not evaluate constructs such as 'attitude' or 'stereotypes' when attempting to explain social interaction, rather he or she is to look at how language is utilised to perform social actions (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Cognitive phenomena such as 'attitudes' are understood as context-based, and discourses will vary according to the demands of particular contexts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Language negotiates meaning within discourse, and is utilised to manage the interests of its user. Language functions to accomplish various versions or constructions of an event or phenomenon. By emphasising the action-orientation of language, discourse - rather than cognition - becomes the locus of discursive action, that is, what people do or accomplish through talk (Willig, 2001). Discursive psychology is then an approach - rather than a method - embedded within social constructionism (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Potter, 2003). The primary commitment of discursive psychology is to examine how people do things with discourse, within a context of interaction. Examining how discourse acts is a valuable means of understanding psychological functioning (Wetherell, 2007).

Discursive psychology is primarily concerned with identifying interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Interpretive repertoires are broadly discernible linguistic devices used with some stylistic coherence on which people draw when constructing actions and events. They are usually organised around a particular metaphor or trope, and encompass grammatical regularity. These repertoires are not concerned with the content of discourse and may be regarded as available toolkits, utilised for creating a seemingly factual or stable reality. They are flexibly drawn upon to perform a number of functions, which consequentially result in much variability or contradiction within discourse. A repertoire is then drawn on in accordance to its suitability to one's immediate context (Potter & Hepburn, 2007; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter et al., 1990). This variability is the rule rather than the exception and signifies that language aims to achieve different things at different points in a text by drawing on a number of discourses. Similarly, it is important to make note of a discourse's flexibility, where the same kind of account is utilised to perform different social actions on different occasions. However, identifying interpretive repertoires is not enough; researchers must recognise the use and function of these repertoires as well as the problems generated by their existence. A discourse analysis examines the ideological implication of various repertoires, and highlights the differences within or between repertoires (Burr, 1995; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Interpretive repertoires allow for a kind of order to emerge from the seemingly chaotic and arbitrary form of everyday language. This study focuses on interpretive repertoires as devices, rather than interpretative repertoires which may be considered as the performative component of interpretive repertoires.

This study used a revised version of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) stages of discourse analysis. Rather than a set of definitive steps, these stages served as a loose guide for conducting the discourse analysis, and were continually revisited and adjusted throughout the analysis.

The first step in the analysis is coding the data. Coding entails condensing a large body of discourse into smaller fragments and serves as a prerequisite for the main analysis. Indeed, the research question may develop or alter considerably throughout the coding process. Coding must be as comprehensive as possible, admitting all vague or ambiguous cases that may relate to the research question so that potentially relevant accounts are adequately considered. In the context of this study, the coding process admitted all responses which overtly or implicitly addressed fatherhood in the participants' community (Willig, 2001).

Each word or phrase which was - even vaguely - relevant was underlined and was designated a particular code. For example, in the sentence “if a father doesn’t find a job, he must think of something else to do other than drinking or smoking, something that will help his family” – a number of simple, concrete codes emerged such as: ‘unemployment’, ‘drinking’, ‘smoking’, ‘helping’, and ‘father must help family’. At the end of this process hundreds of codes had emerged. These codes were then read over and the researcher identified which were most common or salient, which were irrelevant or redundant, as well as which could be collapsed into others. After some time modifying and grouping these codes, they eventually became more comprehensive ‘themes’ or interpretive repertoires. The various discourses were then sorted under these specific themes as a means of categorising the data.

The next stage was the main analysis, which did not encompass a single methodological procedure. It would appear that the only prerequisite for discursive psychology is examining various uses of interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Therefore identifying interpretive repertoires pertaining to fatherhood in the participants’ community, as well as questioning my reading of these data, formed the primary focus of this stage. Reading and rereading was crucial in this sense, with an emphasis on detail rather than developing a general overview. In order to improve the study’s credibility, a critical rationalism of sorts was incorporated into the analysis, whereby every effort was made to falsify initial assumptions about the data as a means of justifying the final interpretation (Silverman, 2012). Indeed, it is important that the researcher is able to trace the route which he or she has taken in arriving at a particular interpretation so that such an interpretation is both justified as well as valid (Mason, 1996). The literature review was continually revisited during this stage, and all discourse examined in this study was scrutinised and compared to previous research findings. It was critical to identify that which was disproved, expanded upon or reiterated within this study’s data. With respect to the analysis process itself, the discursive action model and techniques of fact construction discussed by Edwards and Potter (1992) was heavily drawn on. Finally, the variability and consistency of identifiable patterns within the discourse were noted, as well as the function and consequence that such discourse served. During this stage it was continually asked what specific discourses were trying to achieve at particular points, as well as why they were trying to achieve this.

The final step, known as validation, employs two prominent techniques. Firstly, the coherence of the discourse - which relates to the researcher's understanding of a participant's response - indicates whether a text can be considered for analysis at all. If there was a large amount of ambiguity or indecipherable speech, the discourse was discarded. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, fruitfulness refers to the value of the discourse with regard to the researcher's ability to produce a relevant interpretation of it. The interpretation of the data was always held against the study's three central research questions as a means of attempting to ensure its validity.

Reflexivity refers to the effect that a researcher has on his or her research findings as well as the process of research (Terre Blanche et al., 2008). The researcher must reflect on the social, cultural and historical forces that may have affected his or her interpretation of the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000), with the aim of being impartial rather than objective, whereby arguments are balanced rather than non-existent (Patton, 1999). Social constructionism is then a recipient of its own critique, with the research report stressing that the analysis has not offered any kind of definitive truth. Objectivity is indeed an impossibility within a social constructionist framework, with all knowledge claims regarded as positioned. Therefore, alternate readings of the research findings are as valuable as those presented in this research report (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999).

The social and political locations of the researcher must be acknowledged so that he or she is aware of that which influences the production of knowledge (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), meaning that my own position as researcher would have affected my reading of particular discourses. My position as a white, university-educated male of relatively high socio-economic standing is likely to have created an explicit and very real distance between myself and participants, and may have hindered my understanding and interpretation of their experience, as well as influenced the kind of discourse evoked within the interviews and group meetings. Unequal power dynamics as well as issues of trust and difference were therefore present throughout the research process. My outsider status may have also influenced the manner in which I was observed by the participants, how I observed them, and the degree of comfort which participants felt toward me, thereby hindering communication.

All findings presented in this report are emphasised as an interpretation, and therefore encourage the reader's assessment and rereading of the data. Furthermore, the report

highlights language as the primary constructor of meaning, which may promote further reinterpretation of the findings, thereby furnishing the findings with a potential dynamism.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

#### **3.7.1 Informed consent**

Informed assent (see Appendix A) was obtained from the participants, and informed consent (see Appendix B) was obtained from their parents or carers prior to the study taking place. Each form emphasised the nature as well as the purpose of the study, and served as a reminder that participants were able to withdraw from the study at any stage (Gray, 2004). Both consent and assent forms indicate that parents and participants grant permission to the researchers to use the photographs taken by the participants as well as the photographs' accompanying narratives in academic publications and presentations, but their use for any other purpose must be approved by both parents and participants (Wang, 2006).

#### **3.7.2 Confidentiality**

Anonymity of all participants was ensured by the use of pseudonyms as well as the omission of any explicitly identifiable information from the research records. Geographic locations and people's names were also omitted from the research report in order to ensure anonymity (Henn et al., 2009; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Confidentiality of information shared within focus groups could not be guaranteed as it was possible that group members disclosed information discussed in the focus groups to non-participants outside of the group. The importance, but also the limits, of confidentiality were discussed with participants in the first session so that they were able to make an informed decision about what material to disclose to the group.

#### **3.7.3 Benefits**

Those who participated in this study did not receive any direct benefits, however a number of indirect benefits are inherent within the Photovoice methodology, most crucially the potential for individual and community empowerment. Added to this, Photovoice researchers have noted an increased confidence and sense of community among participants (Suffla et al.,

2012). Exploring children's visual depictions of their fathers may have allowed a kind of reflection among participants, which may not have otherwise taken place. Participants may have gained satisfaction with the knowledge that they - in some way - helped to improve their community, and had fun during this process (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Moletsane et al., 2009). Learning to operate a camera and take photographs has been shown to build self-esteem and self-competence of the photographer, who may - in the process - feel validated and that his or her opinions carry some kind of substance (Strack et al., 2004). With regard to long-term benefits, the data will be used to assist family intervention programmes in the community, which participants will likely benefit from.

#### **3.7.4 Risks**

While taking photographs of objects or places presented a low risk to participants, taking photographs of other people may have incurred risks. In the second session, before participants were given their cameras, the group facilitators discussed with the participants how to make safe choices about what and who to photograph. This included discussions about the need to obtain verbal consent from people who they may wish to photograph, what is an acceptable way to approach someone to take his or her picture, and how to judge which situations may entail risk. Participants were specifically instructed not to trespass on others' property and not to photograph illegal activities, of which examples were discussed. In the report, all faces of persons in the photographs are blurred out. Added to this, care was taken to ensure that no photograph causing potential embarrassment, offence, or harm was included in the report (Moletsane et al., 2009). All participants were given a choice to withdraw from the study at any time. It was made clear that the researcher was the first to see the photographs upon development, meaning that extra care was taken not to include any 'regrettable photographs' (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Finally, the clinical psychologist, who was the co-facilitator on this project, was responsible for identifying and emotionally containing participants who were potentially distressed by the content of the focus groups or interviews (Henn et al., 2009). However, there was no need for the psychologist to offer emotional containment to any of the participants as none of them displayed any distress during the interviews.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter has provided a motivation for, and a description of, the particular methodology utilised in this study. The chapter began by outlining the study's aims, which was followed by the research design employed, and then the method and procedures of data collection. Finally, the analysis employed in this study was described, as well as its ethical components. The following chapter presents the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the interpretive repertoires upon which participants drew in the study's photo-elicitation interviews, which collectively examined 86 photographs. The following eight repertoires were identified: Fatherhood as a Choice, Gendered Parenting, Maternalism as Natural Parenting, Fragmented Fatherhood, Inactive Fathering, Provider and Childrearer, Essential Father Versus the Important Father, and Collective Enterprise of Fathering. These interpretive repertoires are each described and illustrated with quotations from participants, and are discussed with regard to existing findings and literature on fathering, with an attempted sensitivity to the sociocultural context of these participants. The analysis of the discourse does not necessarily speak only to fathering per se, but also to discourses for which fathering acts as a proxy. For example, there are discourses identified within the study which speak to new masculinities, motherhood, femininity, essentialism and familist discourses. Participants' talk is therefore located within broader discourses of gender and parenting. For a more detailed transcription notation, see Appendix D. Photographs are included where participants made explicit or direct reference to a specific image.

#### 4.1 Fatherhood as a Choice

Participants who drew upon the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire constructed a father's roles and behaviours as choices which men are consciously and agentially able to make. This repertoire assumes the father has the power to select from different ways of fathering, and that the selection that is made reflects an inherent moral character or lack thereof. The discourse constructs a number of inter-related parenting choices available to fathers. Such choices include whether to indulge in a hedonistic and irresponsible lifestyle, whether to take on 'new fathering' or to enact traditional fathering practices, as well as how emotionally close he will be with his family.

*P4: This picture tells me a story that a father that likes drinking can even change to a father that doesn't drink because I was like there, last month Saturday. My uncle, his friend came there and was like 'let's drink, drink!' and he told them 'no I can't drink I just want to stay with my children'. So I was like okay, I will take picture when you are going to sleep. If you can see, there's no woman here, ja. And then,*

*okay, my auntie was at work because she works at night and then I was like impressed because my uncle is not drinking today but every Saturday he drinks so this means that a father that is drinking can change to a father that cares for children and sacrifices alcohol.*

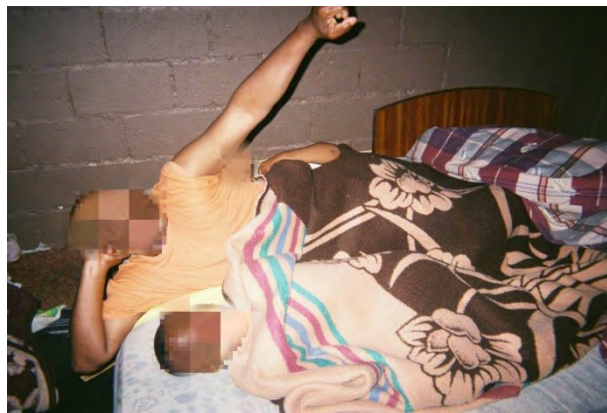
*P11: Fathers, they [should] spend more quality time with their children, they are trying to have fun with their children.*

*Researcher: Do fathers do this? Do most fathers do this?*

*P11: No, they don't spend time with their children.*

*Researcher: And you said you're not sure why?*

*P11: I'm not.*



**Figure 1:** P4's uncle and cousins.

*Researcher: What do you like about this?*

*P6: I like it because he's there for his family, because I didn't see their mother, they are just children playing with their father. So he is there, playing with them enjoying them and giving them some fun because they were enjoying it.*

*Researcher: Do you see that a lot, fathers having fun with their children like that?*

*P6: No there are few fathers. Because it was a weekend some fathers they are busy drinking, some at work, and there are few others who have time to spend with their families.*

*Researcher: Do you think it's a father's job to spend time with their families?*

*P6: Yes.*

*Researcher: But [earlier] you said that they drink or go to work so why do you think they don't do that?*

*P6: Because on the weekdays they are busy working and they just go drinking and chill with their friends so some fathers drink because they have stress and they don't want to have time with their families and they don't want to buy groceries, they just*

want to drink all of the money so they don't have time for their families. They don't want to come to their wives who tell them 'where is the money?' So they just go to the tavern and drink.



**Figure 2:** P6's photograph of a father and his children on a beach.

The three excerpts above illustrate that participants drawing from this repertoire centred their constructions of fathers around the notion of agentic paternal abandonment, whereby fathers are established as opting out of childcare or at least being able to do so if they wish. P4's discourse focuses on the notion of change, and that a father may vacillate freely between 'good dad' and 'bad dad' constructs. Her emphasis on the fluidity of fathering constructs a choice that fathers are able to exercise in their parenting roles which, when taken on, "impressed" the participant. Involved fathering in this sense is established as remarkable rather than expected. Similarly, P6's discourse highlights the low expectations surrounding fathering, where the father is not expected to spend even a "whole day" with his children. The speaker's assertion that fathers are "*trying* to have fun with their children [emphasis added]" implies a kind of consciously exerted effort in this choice. The father's decision to parent is then constructed as a virtuous choice. He is presented as having made the correct choice where so many have not, and paternal abandonment becomes normative, expected from most men. The use of such discourse may act to entrench a culture, expectation and acceptance of paternal abandonment or paternal uninvolvedness.

By constructing the father as occupying a part-time parental post continually threatened by abandonment, a man's parenting is established as remarkable when visible. Conversely, such discourse positions the mother as the competent, superior, full-time parent. She is expected to parent better than the father. Such normalising practice discursively allows mothering to operate unpronounced (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Indeed, P4 claims to be "impressed"

that her uncle is fathering his children, and states that “If you can see, there’s no woman here”. The father’s choice to be with his children is made even more impressive as the mother is not present. With “no woman there”, the father is parenting autonomously, without expert maternal guidance. Similarly, P6 claims that “I like it [the photograph] because he’s there for his family, because I didn’t see their mother, they are just children playing with their father”. It appears that repertoires which construct an air of approval around the ‘new’ father very often make reference to the mother. Indeed, the ‘new’ father construct may stray too far from hegemonic masculine ideals to operate competently and autonomously. Fathers are constructed as attempting a practice which mothers carry out much more quietly and expertly (Sunderland, 2000). The father’s ability to parent unsupervised becomes remarkable in this sense, and it would seem that discursively bringing the mother construct into the father’s childrearing space prevents paternal constructs from absorbing autonomous, convincing parenting.

It would appear that a core facet of the ‘good dad’ is that he has made *the decision* to “have time for” his family. P4’s discourse attempts to establish a dichotomy inherent in the choice of fatherhood, whereby a father is to align himself either with an irresponsible lifestyle - usually represented in participants’ discourse, as well as in their photographs, by alcohol - or caring for his family which is represented by fulfilling either traditional or ‘new’ fathering roles. Structuring the ‘Fatherhood as a Choice’ repertoire around dichotomising language acts to simplify bad fathering – men can choose to be either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The rhetoric therefore ensures that fathers who make the ‘wrong choice’ (bad fathering) are condemned by the listener (Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995). P4’s simplifying rhetoric disregards alternative reasons as to why fathers do not engage in active parenting, perpetuating a kind of homogenous and negative image of the ‘bad dad’, who is bad only because he has chosen to be this way. Underlying this is then a construction of this father’s moral weakness.

The notion of fatherhood as a choice is also exercised in discourse concerning traditional fathering roles, such as that of the provider. These traditional roles must be performed if the father is to embody the ‘good father’ construct (Roy & Dyson, 2010). What follows are examples of discourse which construct the good father as one who consciously takes on traditional fathering, and therefore functions to maintain traditional masculine and fathering expectations.

*P15: This man here, he is a father of two children, and he didn't finish school, he left school at grade nine. In the first year, he stayed at home, and the second year he stayed at home and then got piece jobs but they didn't last for long so he decided to open a salon so that he could give his children a better future than when he was giving them when he was not working.*

*Researcher: So, what story were you trying to tell us with this photograph?*

*P15: That fathers don't have to be educated or have good jobs or have high jobs to provide for their families, and give their children what's best for them.*

...

*Researcher: And when they do do that it's something that you like to see. And do most fathers take that initiative to start a business to make an effort, even when things are difficult, as you say, like not have an education?*

*P15: There are fathers that think that 'I'm not going to open a local business where people are going to look at me the whole day, I'm just going to sit around here' but there are fathers who have the courage of the mind to open a local business to provide. But I would say it's 50/50 because there are fathers who are still staying at home and watch other people go to work and they are like 'I'm not going to that. I'm not going to open a local business where people are maybe going to make fun of me.' Something like that.*



**Figure 3:** P15's photograph of a father who opened a salon to support his family.

*P6: Some fathers are too lazy. Even too lazy to seek for a job. I think with this man, maybe he seek for a job and he didn't find it so he thought of something, a creative*

*thing, for him and his family to have something to eat for a day so he opened a business.*

*Researcher: So do you think a father might, as you say, seek a job and not find one, or do you think there's always something a father can do?*

*P6: Yes, rather than going and drinking because some fathers in {Name of community}, they don't have work, but they're always in the tavern drinking and I'm just wondering where do they get the money because they are drinking?*

*...*

*Researcher: Okay, so what do you think happens more: fathers who make a plan for money, of fathers that go to the tavern?*

*P6: S'joe, in the tavern!*

*Researcher: Okay, so what does this say about fathers in {Name of community}, or what you would think about fathers in {Name of community}?*

*P6: I think fathers in {Name of community}... if a father doesn't find a job, he must think of something else to do other than drinking or smoking, something that will help his family.*



**Figure 4:** P6's photograph of a father who washes cars to support his family.

P6's discourse constructs the good father as one who chooses to provide for his family. The discourse does this by use of lexicalisation, that is, establishing the father's characteristics as part of his essentialised form, thereby strengthening the rigidity of the category to which he is constructed as belonging (Gelman & Heyman, 1999). This is most obviously noted in the discourse's use of the word "lazy". A temporary disposition, such as 'tired' becomes more resilient and morally laden with the label 'lazy', and that which contradicts such a label may be ignored. This label acts to fix a father's joblessness to his moral character, and ensures that unemployment - that is, subverting the father's traditional provider role - remains

incompatible with constructions of a 'real' father. This discourse is unable to present a non-providing man as one who is able to retain any kind of fathering identity. Indeed, providing is established as something that all men - irrespective of circumstance - are able to do and if they do not provide they are skirting paternal obligation, agentially exercising their ability to choose not to parent.

In recounting a single example which is to stand for all - thereby lending a kind of robustness to the rhetoric (Edwards et al., 1995) - P15's discourse constructs a father who is not "educated" and does not have "good jobs or have high [paying] jobs", yet he is able to encompass the provider role. Initially, this father did not provide for his family – an action which is constructed as a choice which this father had made. His actively choosing not to work, rather than passively being unable to work, is exemplified when P15 states "There are fathers that think that 'I'm not going to open a local business ... I'm just going to sit around here'". Eventually this father has "the courage of the mind" to take up fathering duties, start his own business and "give his children a better future". The only obstacle to overcome when taking on the provider role appears to come from the father himself, noted when the discourse addresses many fathers' apparent attitude toward getting a job: "I'm not going to open a local business where people are maybe going to make fun of me". There is no mention of financial or economic barriers to taking on the provider role. The only barrier which prevents the father from taking on such a role is his own pride. This rhetoric implies that if a father is not working, he has chosen to be a 'deadbeat dad', and not fulfilling the provider role means that a man is not fathering (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

Participants who spoke of a father that does not provide for his family constructed such a father as actively choosing to forgo traditional paternal duty. Constructions of this nature may act to entrench a culture of paternal abandonment, where fathers are reminded that if they are unable to financially provide for their families, they are relinquishing the type of parenting expected from them (Richter, 2006). Contrary to Richter and Smith's (2006) findings, participants in this study seem to display little understanding or empathy with regards to paternal unemployment. Joblessness is constructed as a kind of choice which fathers make as there are always ways of making money, with the father's own actions and character (laziness or pride) being the only deterrent to this. This somewhat narrow interpretation of unemployment is perhaps due to the rigid construction of the traditional father's role as a

breadwinner. By not providing for his family, a man is positioned as choosing to abandon fatherhood in order to pursue his own hedonistic pleasure.

In a similar manner to the 'Part-Time Father/Mother as Main Parent' discourse drawn on by participants in Sunderland's (2002) study, the father's ability to choose the parenting activities in which he is involved was often constructed by participants against the obligatory nature of motherhood, which emerged as the central, more natural parenting role. In this regard fathers are awarded a kind of familial power which is discursively robbed from the mother, who passively receives her role as primary childcarer. Agentalising fathering in this regard may act to maintain structures of paternal dominance within the family unit, while simultaneously ensuring that mothers remain constructed as superior childcarers. The mother cannot choose to parent as the father is able to, and remains the passive - albeit more skilled and 'natural' - childrearer, embodying considerably less familial power (though possibly an elevated moral status) compared with the agentalised, discursively-empowered father construct. This notion of unequal parental power was furthered by those participants who constructed the level of intimacy experienced between fathers and other family members as determined exclusively by the father. In participants' discourse, it is presupposed that both children and mothers already care deeply for fathers. The father may join his family in such caring only if he chooses to do so.

*P4: Yeah. My mother used to tell me that my father used to carry me, sometimes we'd go out and be happy. But now my mom, she is no longer here but I can see that my father doesn't take care of me – he just loves his other children.*

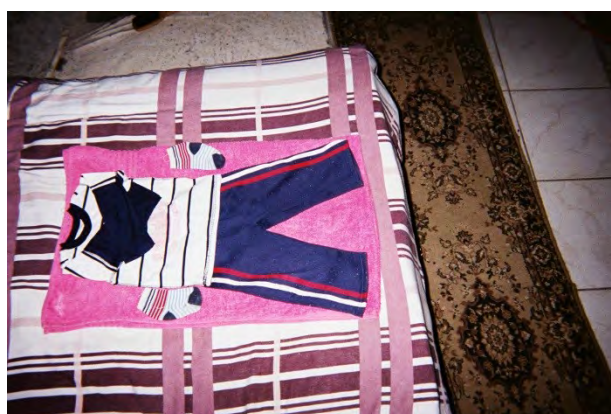
*Researcher: And I'm sure that's difficult. Well thank you for sharing that with us. What were you telling us about fathers in general with this photograph?*

*P4: This [photograph] told me that you mustn't expect your father to love you always, a father can change when you are growing up.*

...

*Researcher: So what you were saying with this photograph is that because relationships end, most fathers start out with intentions but then the relationship changes and then things end badly. So that was story with your photo, how does this photo make you feel – do you like what you photographed?*

*P4: Ja, it makes me feel like, bad because now I'm old but I will sometimes wish that I was small again, you see? And have that attention that my father gave me when I was small.*



**Figure 5:** P4's clothing that she wore as a small child.

*Co-Researcher: I just wanted to ask about the previous one: in the previous photo you said that you liked the father and a woman together, I was just wondering why you think it's important?*

*P8: Sometimes it's important to spend time with your woman so like she wouldn't think that you don't totally care about her. Like, not spending quality time with your friends or spending time doing your job, sometimes you must show how love them and why are with them at this time.*



**Figure 6:** P8's photograph of two adults in a relationship, spending time together.

The above excerpts construct the choice that fathers are able to make with regard to being intimate with their families. Intimacy, in this sense, refers to an emotional and personal closeness (Dermott, 2008). Where P4's discourse establishes the speaker as longing for a time when her father loved her, P8's advocates the importance of outwardly displaying love and care so that a father's partner "wouldn't think that you don't totally care about her". In both instances, it is presupposed that a family member cares for the father and is waiting for

his reciprocation. The emotional closeness that family members are able to feel with a father is entirely hinged on his decision to engage with this closeness.

In a demonstration of rhetorical flexibility (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008), P4's previous excerpt - which told "a story that a father that likes drinking can... change" - constructed "change" or fluidity as a positive feature of the father, however in the above extract "change" is constructed as damaging. Indeed the excerpt above presents how the father used to be and how he is presently as demonstrative of his ability to vacillate between abandonment and intimacy. P4 does not wish for her father to treat her as he used to, but rather that she was once again young and able to elicit care from him. The discourse establishes its speaker as "old", a hyperbolic claim which constructs P4 as tainted and therefore undeserving of her father's intimacy. By locating the need for change within the self rather than the father, the speaker establishes herself as needing to once again be appealing to her father in order to win the favour of his decision to be intimate. The locus of this change is important in recognising the kind of power which this discourse awards the father. Agency and the ability to be truly critical of the father may be denied to other members of the family in this sense, and the father's dominance within the family construct is maintained (Miller, 2011).

By utilising the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire, participants act to entrench the notion that becoming a father (that is, producing a child) is central to hegemonic masculinity (Bane Nsamanang, 2010), however fathering one's child/ren is not. The choice to father is usually presented in absolutist terms: if fathers do not choose to be with their families, they have chosen to abandon them in order to pursue their own needs. It would seem that the father - unlike the mother - is able to renounce and take up parenting as often as he wishes. Fathering then emerges as an unstable antithesis to the mother's constant, primary parenting. In this sense, father-child relations may become stifled as children could come to expect inferior parenting from fathers, who themselves may conceptualise parenting as that for which they are innately unprepared. A father's feelings of parental unpreparedness, coupled with the difficulties he may experience in fulfilling the provider role, have been linked to paternal non-residence (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011). However participants discursively constructed only minimal reasons as to why fathers abandon their families, outside of their own selfish desires. Fathers who are unable to provide for their families are operating outside of traditional fatherhood constructions and are conceptualised as selfishly choosing to do so. Economic hardships are constructed as navigable if a father is willing to work, and to make the choice to

provide for his family. The 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire therefore institutionalises the father as a secondary parent who is able to exercise choice with regard to partaking in parental care, an activity which lies at the core of dominant constructions of motherhood.

#### 4.2 Provider and Childrearer

Participants drawing on this repertoire appeared to discursively construct conflicting fathering expectations, whereby fathers should encompass the roles of both fulltime childrearer and provider. As dictated by the availability hypothesis, fathers who are financially secure are better equipped to fulfil the roles of both provider and childrearer, however, fathers from resource-poor areas often feel great pressure to financially support their children and spend time with them (Richter, 2006). Those who participated in this study utilised discourse which constructed good fathering as having to simultaneously encompass both of these roles. By positing fathering as having to comprise traditional ideals, that is, having to provide financially for one's family (Richter & Smith, 2006), as well as 'new fathering', which propounds that a father spend quality time with his children (Dick, 2011), this repertoire highlights tensions which fathers - especially of low socioeconomic standing - may experience. As a means of discursively negotiating the difficult position into which fathers are placed by use of this repertoire, participants' discourse either made use of variability, or advocated one kind of fathering over the other (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010; Roy, 2010).

*P3: No, let me put it in an easy way: if you want to become a good father, you must not abuse your wife, go to work, work well at work, don't go for long hours, spend time with your children and your wife.*

*Researcher: Do you not think he [the father in the photograph] works long hours?*

*P3: He does not work long hours because he opens at eight and closes at three PM.*

*Researcher: Okay, but you say he must look after the family as well, do you not think that sometimes to do that, you maybe have to work long hours?*

*P3: No.*



**Figure 7:** P3's photograph of a father who works to support his family.

*P4: Yes, it [fathers prioritising work obligations over their families] happens a lot because sometimes my friend will come and tell me that 'my father missed my birthday because of the work' and so I will say 'sorry about that' and so this happens a lot around here.*

*Researcher: But the movie had a happy ending. Do you think that happy ending happens a lot around here?*

*P4: Ja, maybe sometimes because he will be ashamed after doing that. Like that picture says parents can be selfish, he can be like 'oh my God there is something missing in my life' and he could go back and apologise to the family and they could get along again.*

*Researcher: So with this photograph you were saying that...*

*P4: Fathers should spend time with their children even if they are like very busy.*

*Researcher: Do you think maybe it's quite difficult for fathers because as you were saying it's traditional for fathers to work.*

*P4: Ja, it's traditional but it's like too much now. Because of the money I am going to this appointment and going to this appointment. If you can promise that maybe next month I will be taking you guys out and we will be like 'okay daddy'. And then next month he's like 'no I can't because of job'. He takes job more seriously than the family because he can lose his family than his job because you can lose the job and have it again so it's like that.*



**Figure 8:** P4's photograph of a film still.

The above excerpts construct a father who, in order to fully immerse himself with the duties expected of him, must concurrently embody the roles of provider and childrearer. P3's discourse attempts a kind of formulaic construction of that which constitutes a good father: "you must not abuse your wife, go to work, work well at work, don't go for long hours, spend time with your children and your wife". Listing, in this instance, attempts to rhetorically establish a comprehensive or complete representation of the good father, and it is because of this list's apparent completeness that such a construction maintains a kind of robustness or, put another way, becomes difficult to overtly refute (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This construction presents the good father as working to provide for his family, and he is to "work well" within a few hours so that later he is able to spend time with them. These 'instructions' attempt to resolve the ideological tension between new and traditional fathering; if a father is not able to spend time with his family, he need only work better or harder in order to do so. In this sense, that which prevents fathers from fulfilling these ideals is located within the father, thereby discursively placing this burden on him. Such an onus may then, according to the availability hypothesis, be compounded by living in a low socioeconomic area (Miller, 2011; Richter, 2006; Roy, 2004). The discourse therefore constructs fathering as inadequately embodied if fathers do not embrace these two difficult and somewhat conflicting roles.

The rigidity of the father construct is exemplified by P3 responding "No" when asked if fathers may need to work longer hours to provide for their families. The participant constructs fathering as inflexibly having to encompass both new and traditional fathering ideals, and awards men the agency to take on these roles, with the implication that if they do not embody them it is because they are unwilling rather than unable. Similarly, P4's discourse appears to discursively position the bad father as having chosen work over his children, which is then established as "selfish" and alludes to paternal neglect. Such discourse is therefore aligned with Roy's (2004) assertion that 'new fathering' has an 'all or nothing' facet in its

conceptualisation. Low-income fathers seem to find themselves in a difficult position with regards to such constructions, where they are expected to provide, but by doing so still run the risk of becoming a ‘deadbeat dad’ (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

‘New fathering’ was often worked into traditional fathering rhetoric so that the two somewhat contradictory expectations could be maintained. Jobs are rather unrealistically constructed as fluid and available when P4 states that fathers “can lose the job and have it again”. Not fulfilling both the childrearer and provider roles rests on the father’s apparent misunderstanding of the ease with which he is able to get jobs, and the father’s own sacrifice in maintaining a job is muted within the discourse. Indeed, for some men involvement in their children’s lives could mean financial support (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). By emphasising the importance of family in this regard, ‘new fathering’ rhetoric is utilised and is appropriated to construct the father as having to embody traditional fathering ideals, such as providing. Where P3’s discourse places the onus on a father’s working hard to fulfil the roles of fulltime provider and carer, P4’s rests on the father’s understanding that although he must work for his family, spending too much time away from them is not necessary and may be considered “selfish”. It appears that within the discourse, ‘new fathering’ is only able to function with the implicit understanding that traditional fathering is being performed adequately.

Participants’ rhetoric did not always ignore financial strains and accompanying pressures. However, although fathers were expected to embody both roles, one role was often prioritised over the other so that taking on both would seem plausible. Neither new nor traditional fathering was able to function independently from the other within constructions of the good father.

*Researcher: And do you think that a parent can be a single parent and do it alright?  
Does he need a partner? Does he need someone else to help him parent?*

*P11: No. he could support his family on his own, like that one [in Figure 3] that has started his business and then they’re living happily, with his children because he supports them in a different way, financially and other stuff.*

*Researcher: Do you think it might be difficult to maybe be there with his kids because he maybe works quite hard?*

*P11: During the day he might not be there, but I think at night, and his children want help with school stuff, he might help them.*

*Researcher: And then what do you think about things like, maybe this, because as a single father he works in the day and then the children maybe play in the road? Do you think that could happen with his children?*

*P11: Ja, he can't be there for them because he will be stopped by his business.*

*Researcher: How does this show what you think about fathers in this area?*

*P8: This picture shows that the father cares. I don't see fathers that buy things for their kids, yes. The new born babies. They just run away when the child is born.*

*Researcher: Why do you think that happens?*

*P8: I don't know because most of the fathers, they don't have jobs to maintain their children, they just run away when their unborn babies are born, yes.*

...

*Co- Researcher: If they didn't have a job how do you think they could then be there for the child?*

*P8: Instead of running away? Like, most children, we don't need stuff like money and that, we need love. Most of the children, for our fathers we don't just need things from them. Just love, love is the mostest of them all.*

*Researcher: Are there fathers that still have a job and run away from their children?*

*P8: Yes, they depend on alcohol, they don't care, like totally don't care.*

*Researcher: So there's a couple of reasons why a father doesn't stay, it could be that he doesn't provide, but also that he doesn't care.*

*P8: Yes.*

*Co- Researcher: Why do you think they don't care?*

*P8: I don't really know but let me say, say I ask my father 'daddy will you buy me something?' but 'I don't have money'. I understand sometimes he didn't receive his salary or something but they don't totally care sometimes.*



**Figure 9:** P8's photograph of a father buying things for his family.

P11's discourse appears to construct the roles of both childrearer and provider as important for a father to take on, while apparently favouring the provider role. Indeed, where traditional fathering duties are made clear ("finances"), a vagueness is employed when describing that which encompasses 'new fathering' ("other stuff"), presenting traditional fathering as an established, clearly defined set of duties, where the 'new' father - although still existing - occupies an uncertain and perhaps less important position (Edwards & Potter, 1992). It is by discursively backgrounding 'new fathering' duties, or rather prioritising traditional fathering, that P11's discourse makes conceivable a father's embodiment of these two somewhat contradictory roles. The discourse acts to maintain expectations surrounding both childrearing and providing, however it would seem that the new father is always "stopped" by his obligatory vocational pursuits. Providing then emerges as a 'necessary evil' which is economically important, but prevents the fathering from embodying 'new' paternal ideals. Providing is not seen as a way of investing in one's family, but rather as that which allows a father to escape familial involvement (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). The use of the word "support" in the speaker's first sentence may then refer exclusively to financial support as fulltime care cannot occur if fathers are to fulfil the apparently more important provider role. Although the father is - and is encouraged to be - a carer, P11's discourse constructs material provision as his principle parenting duty.

P8's discourse represents the good father as both provider and childrearer by advocating each role at different instances in the discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Initially, her discourse

constructs bad fathering as not fulfilling ‘new fathering’ ideals when she states “I don’t see fathers that buy things for their kids... They just run away when the child is born”. As bad fathers are said to “just run away”, they are made entirely responsible for not fulfilling the role expected of them, and become discursively agentised, or blamed, in this way (Ratele et al., 2012). Further, when asked for what reasons fathers may “run away” from their families, P8 proclaims that “they don’t have jobs to maintain their children, they just run away when their unborn babies are born”. Once again the importance of providing for one’s family is prized, and repeated allusions to the bad father as one that runs away by contrast positions the father who does not provide as embracing a kind of *boldness*, a word with connotations relating to traditional masculinity (Miller, 2011). However, when asked if providing is the only way a father is able to care for his children, P8’s discourse changes and the new father ideal becomes advocated, with “love” established as all that children require from their fathers. In an attempt to consolidate the provider and childrearer, P8 states in her final sentence: “I ask my father ‘daddy will you buy me something?’ but ‘I don’t have money’. I understand sometimes he didn’t receive his salary or something”. If a father is unable to provide, a temporary understanding is established around this, however the duty to provide still exists. Reasons given for which a father does not provide for his family are “they don’t totally care” or he “didn’t receive his salary or something”. This discourse gives little understanding to external factors which may prohibit a father from providing, or the pressure which a father may feel to fulfil these two roles.

The somewhat conflicting expectations posited by the ‘Provider and Childrearer’ repertoire can lead to low-income fathers experiencing a ‘crisis in masculinity’, whereby fulfilling the role of one fathering ideal results in the neglect of the other, and the father is thus unable to fully embody the gendered expectations which surround constructions of fathering. This is not to negate the responsibilities of ‘bad dads’, however such discourse may devalue or underappreciate a father’s efforts to fulfil one role, due to his inability to take on the other (Morrell & Richter, 2006). It would seem that constructions of this nature do not consider, or are dismissive of, various economic strains to which the provider is susceptible, and aids in the construction of the suspicious South African father by use of blaming discourse, thereby perpetuating stagnant portrayals and interpretations of the ‘bad dad’ (Miller, 2011; Ratele et al., 2012). Discourses which rigidly construct fathering as the embodiment of these two roles may act to disappoint families as well as discourage fathers who could feel that they are unable to embody such difficult masculine ideals (Morrell, 2006).

### 4.3 Gendered Parenting

Participants constructed parenting activities in their community as being performed along traditional gendered lines. Such discourse was either approving of the pragmatic nature of gender-proxy parenting - that is, parenting designated on the basis of traditional gender roles - or was critical in this regard, with female participants usually presenting photographs which depicted fathers subverting the gendered parenting expected from them. Four participants constructed mothers as the appropriate parents for girls, and fathers for boys – each relating and teaching specific skills to their children. Despite this, fathers were discursively backgrounded as mothers were constructed as being able to speak to both genders about ‘anything’, while a father’s capacity to do so was limited by the unemotional masculine construct.

*P7: This is a father, at the shop, buying some stuff for the family. You know that all fathers should go to work and give their wives money to go and buy food but this father didn't do that. [He] Goes to buy food for himself. So I can say that's negative, that's not right.*

*Researcher: So this is negative?*

*P7: It can be positive and negative because I can say that it's wrong when you take that part of your wife. Because this man, this father, is going to shop by his own, to buy food for the family.*

...

*Co- Researcher: But you don't like this and it's not positive. And is it not positive for you because you see it as not a father's role or a man's role to be shopping?*

*P7: Yes I don't see it's a father's role to go buy, I think it must be a woman or mother, wife. Not a father. The father must give her money.*

...

*Co- Researcher: Why do you think that it shouldn't be him?*

*P7: Because he is not the one who's cooking at home, ja, a woman knows what I'm going to cook so he's not the one who's cooking so he's going to buy the wrong stuff and there will be a fight.*



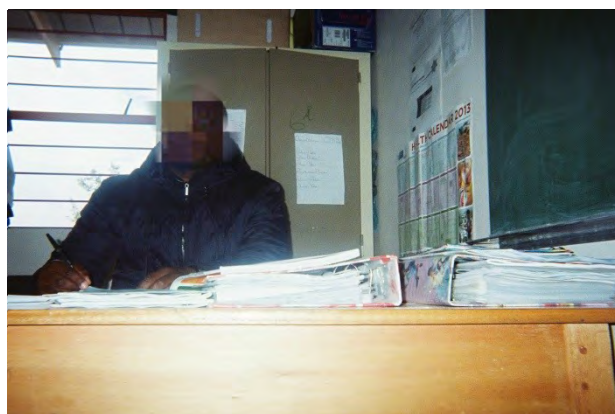
**Figure 10:** P7's photograph of a father buying things for his family.

*P3: I want to say my father cares for me. He buys me new clothes for school, books and everything I need. So what I'm trying to say: fathers must care for their children, do not let your children not go to school. If your child is not educated, he will not go anywhere.*

...

*Researcher: What sort of things does he do for you other than make sure you have an education?*

*P3: He cleans in the yard, house and garden and wash his car.*



**Figure 11:** P3's photograph of his father that cares for him.

The 'Gendered Parenting' discourse, usually drawn on by male participants, fixed gendered parenting roles to both mothers and fathers. These roles were constructed as important as well as serving a specific function, with challenges to these roles usually established as unnecessary. P7's discourse attempts to fix gendered parenting roles to both mothers and fathers, with the roles that each parent "must" perform established as an important facet of his or her identity (Sunderland, 2000). A father buying food for his family is constructed as "wrong" because "you take that part of your wife". Rather than assisting a woman with her duties, or acting to subvert gender roles, such an action is constructed as robbing a woman of an important component of the gender upon which she defines herself. When interrogated as to why these roles need to be maintained, gendered parenting becomes a representation of household tranquillity, as each parent will not perform the other's role satisfactorily and as a result "there will be a fight". Gendered parenting is therefore positioned as both practical and an anchor of domestic peace, and oppressive gender hegemony is made to look pragmatic and somewhat 'natural'. The discourse acts to create a difficult rhetorical situation for those in disagreement as there seems to be no reason to challenge such functional gender roles (Edwards et al., 1995).

P3's speech also acts to define gender as serving a pragmatic purpose. The good father "buys me new clothes for school, books and everything I need" as well as "cleans in the yard, house and garden and wash[es] his car". The good father is constructed as one who ensures that his child is educated, and performs household maintenance duties. If the good father is to function, he must embody that which denotes pragmatism and is associated with traditional fathering. The new father ideal is muted and falls away in this regard, with the discourse acting to maintain traditionally gendered parenting roles.

As a means of discursively upholding gender norms, participants' discourse often established the father construct as the antithesis to the emotional, intangible childcare associated with mothers. One way of doing this is to position fathering as largely encompassing physicality. Indeed, from an early age, a father's interaction with his child often takes place on a primarily physical level (Yogman et al., 1988). Five participants drew on discourses which constructed good fathering as existing predominantly in physical forms, whether this is household maintenance, protecting the family, mediating physical fighting, providing food or ensuring that children are at school. Conversely, traditional mothering was usually associated with more passive activities such as emotional expression. However - in line with Young's (1980)

assertion that femininity is expected to encompass finer movement which does not involve the whole body - if traditional mothering did encompass a physical form, it was usually cooking, cleaning or related to childcare, and therefore took on a less physically demanding form to that of traditional fathering.

*Researcher: So his job is fixing cars. And what does that say about fathers?*

*P1: That a father, he can fix something if it's broken.*

*Researcher: Can a mother fix something if it's broken?*

*P1: No, they can't do jobs like that.*

*Researcher: Why not?*

*P1: Because they're cleaning...*

*Researcher: So can a mother never a fix a car?*

*P1: She can if she trains to.*

*Researcher: Do you think you would see a mother fixing a car ever?*

*P1: No you won't see.*

*Researcher: Why do you think?*

*P1: Because a mother, they do a cleaning job.*



**Figure 12:** P1's photograph of a father who fixes cars for a living.

*Researcher: On this one you've written: 'this is a father who is teaching his daughter how to change a light bulb even though some people consider this boy's work.' So what exactly is happening here?*

*P15: This father is teaching his daughter how to change a light bulb and the reason why I like it so much is because in our culture, changing light bulbs and fixing cars, things like that, are boys work so this father is showing that he can teach his daughter instead of his son how to change light bulbs and things that are considered to be boys work.*

*Researcher: Okay that's nice, and so what was the reason that you took this photograph?*

*P15: Because I wanted to show that some fathers are not as old-fashioned as they say they are because if I saw a father having a light bulb I would think that he wants to teach his son, so I actually saw him teaching his daughter to change a light bulb so I wanted other people to experience it.*

*Researcher: And that was a positive thing for you to see and you wanted other people to see that. And is this a common thing? Do you see this a lot in {Name of community}?*

*P15: No. A lot of fathers don't want their daughters to be changing light bulbs, they want them to cook, wash clothes, some don't even want them to go to school or to work, they want them to get married and look after children.*



**Figure 13:** P15's photograph of a father who is teaching his daughter to change a light bulb.

The above examples illustrate how the 'Gendered Parenting' repertoire can be drawn upon to maintain or subvert gendered notions of parenting. P1's discourse constructs gender as important because of the pragmatism that it serves. Although mothers are able to perform the physical activities associated with masculinity, the reason mothers do not fix things is "because they're cleaning", and gender becomes established as that which designates parenting duty fairly. The discourse posits gender as having 'real' and important ways of structuring parenting, thereby maintaining gendered expectations as well as avoiding any kind of challenge to or subversion of these expectations (Edwards et al., 1995). Similarly, P15 presents parental roles as designated along gendered lines by mapping out traditional mothering along less physical parameters ("cook, wash clothes" as well as "get married and look after children"), where fathering is structured as overtly physical ("changing light bulbs and fixing cars"). However, P15 differs from P1 in that her use of this repertoire does not act to maintain gender hegemony, but rather to contest it. She displays a discomfort with traditional parenting when she proclaims to "like it so much" when the roles are subverted.

Here the 'Gendered Parenting' repertoire is used to demonstrate that "old fashioned" or traditional fathering acts to oppress young girls, whose fathers "don't even want them to go to school or to work, they want them to get married and look after children". The speaker suggests that gendered expectations that fathers hold over girls constrain them by navigating a specific sort of life for them irrespective of how they may feel. This paternally preordained life is defined along notions of passivity, observed in the speaker's use of "get", which may be compared to her use of the active "go" utilised to describe the life of boys. The father in P15's photograph may then serve as a symbol of hope for the speaker as he - although in the minority - lets his daughter into the active, physical world traditionally thrust upon young boys, and teaches the young girl skills so that she may become a part of this world.

It may be argued that men have a stake in maintaining patriarchy, resulting in much of the male participants' discourse constructing gendered parenting as positive, and even more so, important (Edwards & Potter, 1992). It seems notable then that most of the instances which constructed gendered parenting as damaging were provided by the female participants in this study. While six of the participants - all of which were male - constructed parenting along traditionally gendered parameters, eight - of which six were female - drew on more critical discourse which constructed static parenting roles as unjust and as a tool utilised to maintain masculine dominance within the family.

*P15: ... he did not go to work that day when I took this photo and his wife went to work and when she came back she came back to the house and he already cooked a good meal and him and the children were eating and she was resting because she didn't have to do all the work that women normally have to do when they come back from work....*

*Researcher: So this is a positive photograph for you. So what were you telling us about fathers in {Name of community}?*

*P15: That some fathers in {Name of community}, they don't think that their wives have to stay at home and look after their children, they also take up the responsibility of looking after the children and doing household things, household work. They don't look up to their wives to do all the work around the house.*

*Researcher: And does that happen a lot?*

*P15: No.*



**Figure 14:** P15's photograph of a meal that a father cooked for the family.

*P6: This father is going to school, this father is taking his children to school in the morning. Some fathers are ashamed to take their children in a public place like {Name of community} because there are most mothers that are taking their children to school, not fathers.*

*Researcher: So fathers in {Name of community} are ashamed to take their children to school. Are they ashamed to walk in the evenings with them as well?*

*P6: I don't know about that but he's is carrying a school bag. He is not going to work but he is taking his children to school. Some other fathers will think that their friends will think that they are doing a woman's work.*

*Researcher: Do you like seeing this kind of thing?*

*P6: Yes, a lot, because my father never took me to school. He never even fetched me to school. But I like this father because he shows caring, even if his children's mother died, he will support his children.*

...

*Researcher: But they won't be teased by other fathers?*

*P6: I don't know if their friends will tease them but some will say that 'you are a woman, you are doing woman's duties' and say such things like that.*



**Figure 15:** P6's photograph of a father who is taking his children to school.

Rather than the emotionally-distant, pragmatic parenting activities which P3's discourse attributes to the 'good father', P15's speech establishes the good father as one that does not abide by gendered parenting expectations. Rather, the good father is one who shares parental duty with mothers, and is willing to "take up the responsibility of looking after the children and doing household things, household work". In this sense, gendered parenting is constructed as unfair, and parental duty should be shared between parents rather than designated on a gendered basis. The father in the photograph is established as sharing childcaring responsibilities as well as household chores, each of which is integral to traditional mothering constructs. In contrast to P3, P15's account establishes the good father as largely absent in the community, which may be a result of her definition requiring a subversion of traditional parenting, which fathers may feel unable or unwilling to exemplify (Miller, 2011). Further, P15's account requires more from the good father than P3's does. By asserting that the father in her photograph "did not go to work that day", P15's discourse does not exempt him from this duty but rather - like household chores and childcaring - it is a parental responsibility which must be shared with the mother. Good parenting is therefore constructed as a kind of shared duty between the mother and father, and is established as just or fair in this sense. Although working for one's family is inherent within the traditional father construct (Dick 2011), for those of low socioeconomic status - and in the context of critical discourse such as this - it may be assumed that two incomes are required to sustain a family, and it is therefore important that the mother also steps into the working or providing role. Rather than construct working as essential to paternal identity, it would seem that working is a kind of parental necessity, and is carried out by both mother and father as part of good - or shared - parenting (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). The subversion of gender norms then forms an integral facet of P15's 'good parent' construct.

P6 expands on the construction of the good father as one who engages in shared parental responsibility despite the ridicule from others that he is likely to endure. This father consciously embraces and performs traditional mothering and because of this he is ridiculed by his peers. The father's ability to undergo such ridicule is established as a demonstration of his "caring". In a similar manner to which the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire functions, P6's discourse agentialises the father so that good fathering in this instance is prevented only by a father's own pride and his willingness to be "ashamed". That which prevents him from taking his children to school and encompassing good parenting is therefore located exclusively within the father as an individual. The discourse somewhat inadvertently establishes traditional fathering expectations as exemplifying a self-centred form of pride which prevents positive fathering practices - largely associated with the new father - from taking place. Further, by stating that the father "is not going to work but he is taking his children to school", paternal childcare in this photograph is constructed as being performed in an alternative manner to traditional fathering expectations. Although this father is not at work as gender norms dictate, he is able to care for his child in a way that is traditionally associated with mothering. Like P15, P6's discourse propounds that parenting duties should be split fairly rather than appointed by means of a parent's gender.

Despite participants' discursive constructions either advocating or critiquing gendered parenting, many constructed a kind of gendered manner in which parents should approach childcare. Consistent with findings on father-child relations (Morman & Floyd, 2006; Sharpe, 1994; Spjeldnaes et al., 2011), four of the participants positioned fathers as parents for boys and mothers for girls within their discourse, with the rationale that fathers are unable to discuss any kind of femininity with young girls, yet are crucial in guiding young boys to becoming 'men'. However, the father's position as the secondary parent was maintained by structuring him as unable to connect emotionally with both boys and girls in the manner that is inherent to the mother construct. In this regard, a kind of uneasiness is constructed around father-child relationships.

*Co-Researcher: So he's [the father in Figure 3] the main person responsible for the children?*

*P15: Yes.*

*Researcher: And it sounds like you do think he's doing a good job without the wife. How do you think it might be different if he did have a wife?*

*P15: His children, they do go to school and they are passing but he has girls, he has two children, a boy and a girl, he can talk to his son about anything but it's really difficult because he is one of this old fashioned people and he cannot talk to his daughter so his daughter has a very bad behaviour so I think if the mother was there she could advise the daughter and things could turn differently because she's pregnant now, but she still goes to school but I think it's because she never had a parent or a mother who could talk to her about how to stay safe.*

*Co- Researcher: You don't think her father spoke to her about safe sex?*

*P15: To him it's about providing money, providing a good education but not talking to her, teaching her about babies.*

...

*Co- Researcher: Are there examples of single fathers who are able to do things really really well, who are able to communicate with, especially, their girl children [and] talk about difficult issues?*

*P15: Not a lot of them do that. A lot of them to the tavern and they drink and their children don't have anyone to turn to talk about their problems.*

*Co- Researcher: And what do you think contributes to this problem of communication, especially with girl children, about what you call life issues?*

*P15: I think they are really stuck on the culture that the fathers have to look after the son and the mother has to talk with the daughter about things. They don't think that a man can communicate with his daughter, they think that he can only communicate with his son.*

*Researcher: Is one parent more important than the other do you think?*

*P2: Ja they are both important you see? Maybe you will need your mother if you are a girl and a father if you are a boy.*

*Researcher: So you say that girls need mothers and boys need fathers. Do boys not need mothers?*

*P2: They do too, ja.*

*Researcher: Okay, but do you think they get along with them more?*

*P2: Ja.*

*Researcher: Okay, why do you think boys get along better with fathers and girls with mothers?*

*P2: Because a father can teach a boy to be a man, to not be abusive. If you want to be a man you must not be abusive, you must not drink alcohol or do drugs- and then you call yourself a man? You are not a man.*

P15's discourse constructs fathers as too traditional to speak with young girls about important issues, such as "babies" and birth control. By stating "if the mother was there she could advise the daughter and things could turn differently", the discourse acts to blame the father for his daughter's pregnancy by not being able to discuss such matters, while simultaneously maintaining that mothers are more suited to discussing femininity with daughters. Indeed, rather than hypothetically situating the father as comfortable discussing birth control with his daughter, the discourse establishes the mother's presence as the imagined ideal. A contradiction is then noted within the discourse when the speaker proclaims that the father is able to "talk to his son about anything" and later states that without a mother "children don't have anyone to turn to talk about their problems". The discourse therefore establishes the father as a more suitable parent for sons in some respects; however - by use of discursive variability - he ultimately remains an inferior childcarer to the mother (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

P2's discourse is somewhat more directive than P15's in advocating gendered parenting. Although one parent is not positioned as more important than the other, P2 states that "you will need your mother if you are a girl and a father if you are a boy". In contrast to the discourse utilised by P6 and P15, ideal childcaring per se is not constructed as an activity which is fairly shared between parents, rather, childcare is matched by a parent's gender – mothers are to care for girls and fathers for boys. Indeed, the speaker appears to state that fathers are able to teach boys to be a "man" (with the implication that mothers cannot), and proceeds to define a "man" as one that is not abusive. Perhaps then P2 is advocating good male role models, whereby non-violence can only effectively be taught to boys by good fathers. P2's father does not subvert gender norms as P15's does, rather, he embraces a form of good fathering so that he is able to role model this for his son (the child upon whom he will have the greatest impact) and in this regard upholds the discourse that fathers are parents for boys (Khunou, 2006).

Drawing from the 'Gendered Parenting' repertoire may act to stagnate expectations around fathering, with fathers themselves feeling unable to embrace the 'new fathering' model despite desiring to do so (Dick, 2011; Miller, 2011). Although six of the participants constructed traditional gendered parenting as harmful, eight did not, or spoke of feeling helpless against such an entrenched status quo. By structuring traditional gender roles as functional, effective, or fair, these roles become valued and parents may become pressured

into maintaining hegemonic gender constructs which may act to constrain or limit the parenting roles available to mothers and fathers respectively. Indeed, paternal identity constructed via traditional gendered discourse may contribute to fathers' reluctance to embrace facets of parenting which are attributed to traditional mothering or the new father; potentially maintaining the emotional distance which acts to qualify the father as the secondary, back-grounded parent (Ratele et al., 2012).

#### **4.4 Inactive Fathering**

Participants appear to construct good fathers as active, either by occupying the realm of physicality, or by agentically exercising the ability to choose to father. Conversely, bad fathers are constructed as apathetic, passive or inactive in their fathering. As with the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire, participants who drew from the 'Inactive Fathering' repertoire established the 'bad dad' as one who does not engage with fathering duties and steps away from his family to pursue some kind of destructive hedonism, which was represented in the photographs as cigarettes and/or alcohol. Inactive fathers were presented as either knowingly destructive, or too ignorant and self-involved to realise that they are causing their families pain. Rather than actively destroy their families, such as with abuse, bad fathers are established as doing nothing in the way of childcare, and in this regard it is a father's inactivity that is constructed as evidence of his not caring for his family.

*P13: These two kids were fighting, these are my friends who are going to play soccer, then they [the speaker's friends] see these kids who are fighting, then they stopped them. Then I wondered "where are their fathers?" Because there are two fathers who are going on this side there, and they see these children fighting and they are looking.*

*Researcher: And they walk right past?*

*P13: And they walk right past and I ask "why are they leaving?" That's why I said that they didn't care for children.*



**Figure 16:** P13's photograph of children fighting.

*P8: Okay, if like, if you live with a father that does drinking and gambling sometimes he might promise you: "okay my child, tomorrow I'll take you for shopping" but then the time comes to take you for shopping and he totally forgets, like I ask "daddy you promised me yesterday that you'll take me for shopping" and he doesn't know anything about that, like "no I didn't", like "Yes daddy you did." He totally forgot and forgets everything.*

*Researcher: Did he mind you taking this picture?*

*P8: Like, they minded, they said that I mustn't take their faces.*

*Researcher: Why do you think they didn't want their faces in?*

*P8: They're embarrassed because they are irresponsible, you know? They know this is totally wrong, yes. I explained that this project we're doing at school is about fathers, what fathers do in the community, how they play roles for everybody in the community. But they agreed for me to take the photo but they asked me not to take their faces.*

*Co-Researcher: So if fathers know that what they're doing is wrong and irresponsible and is affecting their children negatively, why do you think they still do it?*

*P8: I'd really like to ask that to them. Seriously though I don't know. We don't think the same way or do things the same way. Others might think it's okay what I'm doing and others might think that it hurts my family but I keep doing it. Other fathers are addicted to something you know? Like, others do drugs, alcohol, gambling, which is wrong – but they don't get it that it's wrong. As I said, they think for themselves, not others, yes.*



**Figure 17:** P8's photograph of a father who is drinking and gambling.

*Researcher: On this one you've written 'drinking a lot, doesn't care for my family.' What's going on here?*

*P7: First of all, with this picture, I asked this man "I want to take a picture of you" and I explained what I'm going to do with this picture but he didn't refuse he said "no no come come come!" because he's drunk he wanted a photograph.*

*Co-Researcher: Do you know him?*

*P7: Yes I know. You see, this is a cigarette, so alcohol, he's drinking a lot, but he doesn't care what I'm going to do with this picture so all he's thinking about – alcohol, cigarette, he's smoking a lot so he says "take a photo of me!" and I told him "I'm going to present about this" and he said "ah I don't care, take a picture."*

*Researcher: And what does that say about fathers?*

*P7: That says that some fathers don't care about their families because if I can go in that situation and ask "where is your child?" "Ah I don't know." All he is thinking about - alcohol - because this is a tavern, all he's thinking about – tavern, drinking, driving.*



**Figure 18:** P7's photograph of a father who is drinking alcohol.

P13's discourse makes use of a narrative technique to rhetorically position inactive fathering as bad fathering (Edwards & Potter, 1992). That which is negative (fighting) comes to fruition and is allowed to fester because of paternal inactivity (Edwards et al., 1995). The father is then to insert himself into this narrative by stopping the fight if he is to take on the 'active' role associated with the good father. By remaining inactive and not involving himself in the fight, he becomes a perpetuator of this negative reality, and encompasses the bad, inactive father within the speaker's narrative. Further, the inactivity of these fathers may represent an abandonment of mediating or breaking up of fights between young boys, an act which is aligned with the active, overtly physical nature that traditional fathering is expected to comprise (Frascarolo et al., 2005). Eventually it is the speaker's young friends who intervene, and the inadequacies of the inactive father are emphasised once more. This intervention from the youth also acts to highlight the inessentiality of the father, whereby his role can be adequately fulfilled by children. The speaker's conclusion (that is, inactivity among fathers serves as evidence for their not caring) is underscored by his asking, somewhat rhetorically, "why are they leaving?", to which he later answers: "they didn't care for their children", and the inherently damaging motivations behind the inactive father's actions become discursively solidified within the narrative.

P8's extract discursively establishes two kinds of inactive fathering, both of which were prevalent in twelve other participants' discourse. The first, which may be observed in P7's photograph, is the inactive father who "might think it's okay what I'm doing", that is, appears to show no remorse for his familial neglect and may not have evaluated his actions - or rather inaction - in a manner that considers their negative effects. The title of P7's photograph: "drinking a lot, doesn't care for my family" similarly positions the father as replacing caring for his family (positive fathering) with drinking alcohol (negative fathering). Throughout this excerpt, the speaker repeats the phrase "all he is thinking about" three times, thus acting to fix as well as emphasise this father's neglectful psyche. "All" he thinks about is that which the speaker constructs in the photograph's title as selfish and destructive, thereby discursively erecting the image of the 'deadbeat dad'. Such a construct is expanded when P7 claims that upon asking the father where his children are, he does not know, implying that his mind and actions are geared entirely toward his own pleasure (Sunderland, 2000; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Further, by insisting that his photograph be taken, the father seems to invite the broadcasting of his negative behavior and in this regard exhibits no remorse or shame for his inactive - or poor - fathering. The fact that he invites such documentation

constructs an innate menace to bad fathering, where the inactive, hedonistic father appears to be proud of his behavior, and is devoid of any kind of moral introspection.

The second kind of inactive fathering, presented in P8's photograph, is the father who thinks "that it hurts my family but I keep doing it", fixing an innate sort of apathy to inactive fathering. This kind of inactive father is aware that he is hurting or neglecting his family, yet continues to do so. Unlike the father construct of P7's photograph, he is ashamed of his actions, as evidenced by the fathers in the photograph ensuring that their faces are hidden. Indeed, these fathers are constructed as knowing that "this is wrong" and are therefore "embarrassed because they are irresponsible". It would seem that they would rather hide and live with their shame than exercise active, positive fathering. Although he is conscious and even embarrassed of his poor fathering, he does not attempt to engage with what may be considered good fathering practice. By proclaiming "seriously though I don't know" when questioned as to why fathers knowingly hurt their families, the discourse withholds any kind of catalyst for causing this father to engage in positive fathering, thereby fixing destructive behavior to the innate moral character of the inactive father. The absence of such a catalyst positions this bad father as one that cannot be salvaged, and his bad, inactive nature seems immutable and permanent. When P8 states that these fathers "think for themselves, not others" the selfishness of the inactive father takes on a robust, immovable sort of construction, and it becomes difficult to understand the self-aware inactive father, or indeed grant him the ability for redemption (Clowes et al., 2013).

It would appear that both types of inactive father are discursively marked with parental apathy, which may be understood as a reflection of the 'cool pose' assumed by some fathers (Roy & Dyson, 2010), or a product of the traditional notion that fathers do not have the innate childcaring ability associated with mothers (Montgomery et al., 2006). Utilising repertoires like 'Inactive Fathering' perpetuates a construction of the father as an incapable or an unwilling parent. Such a rigid construction does not allow for change on the father's part, and his assuming this inactive role may become tied in with what is considered to be a successful performance of masculinity (Miller, 2011; Morrell, 2006). It is against the image of the father as an immovably inadequate childcarer that the mother construct emerges as the more natural or capable parent.

#### 4.5 Maternalism as Natural Parenting

Despite studies showing that positive fathering does not bestow more benefits to boys than it does to girls (Dunn, 2004; Flouri et al., 2002), and that co-parenthood yields especially positive developmental outcomes for a number of reasons (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010), seven participants in this study drew on the ‘Maternalism as Natural Parenting’ repertoire. In understanding that mothering and fathering discursive constructs create one another (Dermott, 2008), participants in this study who drew from this repertoire constructed fathers as too traditional, or innately inferior in their parenting, to be as effective as mothers. It would seem that good parenting forms an integral part of traditional motherhood, where this is not the case for fatherhood. Fathers were often constructed by the participants in this study as being too busy - due either to fulfilling the role of provider or indulging in their own form of pleasure - to adequately care for their children, and lacking important parenting skills which mothers have apparently mastered. The ‘Maternalism as Natural Parenting’ discourse usually attributed such inferiority to the father himself – whether this was to his sex (where a mother’s ability to fall pregnant and breastfeed was constructed as allowing her a closeness to the child which a father could not enjoy) or his gender (where traditional masculine expectations systematically kept fathers at a distance from their children). In this sense, the father emerges in the following examples as an inherently lesser caregiver than the mother, and his place as a secondary parent becomes discursively solidified (Miller, 2011).

*Researcher: Okay, So do you think if you’re a single mom and you have to do things, like fix things, you can do what a father does?*

*P10: Ja, if you are a single mom you take the responsibility of a mother and a father.*

*Researcher: Can a father be a single father?*

*P10: Yes he can but it would be hard for him.*

*Researcher: So it would be more hard for a father. Why is that?*

*P10: Because, fathers, they don’t like doing mothers’ jobs in the house.*

*Researcher: But a mother can do fathers jobs?*

*P10: Ja, it would be hard for the mother also.*

*Researcher: But more hard for the father?*

*P10: Ja, because maybe I’d say the mother of the child leaves the child with the father while the child is maybe one year. So it will be hard. When you are a baby, it still needs to be breastfed.*

*Researcher: Do you think a father can look after a child without a mother?*

*P6: Sjoe, that happens seldom because if a mother is no longer with a child they often take their children to Eastern Cape to stay with their grandparents.*

*Researcher: Rather than stay with the father?*

*P6: Yes.*

*Researcher: Okay, even if it sometimes happens, even if it's not very often, do you think a father can do it?*

*P6: No, because a father is always busy, on the weekend they are busy chilling with their friends but the weekdays they are off at work. Some fathers – they can't even cook. They don't have time to spend with their children so a child will feel a space, like, left out.*

*Researcher: Could a mother do it without the father?*

*P6: Yes.*

*Researcher: How come?*

*P6: Because some fathers abandon their children, they run away from their children when they are still in the stomach. A mother, she is everything to her child. She is supportive; she was able to carry the child for nine months, so she is unable to just abandon his or her child.*

*Researcher: Okay, so that's [drinking] a father's way of having fun. Do mothers have that way of having fun? ... Do they have fun?*

*P11: They do have fun, but in a different way though. Also going out with their friends or spending more time in the house with children.*

*Researcher: Does this happen a lot in {Name of community}, people drinking in the street?*

*P17: Yoh!*

*P16: A lot, a lot. Even yesterday, I was sitting in the sun and there was, even ladies, drinking beer here, I was sitting next to them. Ladies!*

*Researcher: What's the difference between ladies and men drinking beer?*

*P16: Because, ladies mustn't drink beer, or smoke, that's not good.*

*Researcher: Can men do that?*

*P16: No, even men are bad but...*

*Researcher: It's worse for ladies?*

*P16: It's worse. Even when you are pregnant, you are a woman and you are pregnant and you drink beers or smoking. That will affect the baby. It's wrong!*



**Figure 19:** P17's photograph of a father who is drinking alcohol in the street.

By replying “No” in response to whether single fathers are able of exercising some kind of success in childrearing, P6's discourse is clear in constructing fathers as inadequate primary parents. However, she initially engages with the question somewhat indirectly by utilising a ‘furniture argument’, that is, evoking a particular reality as a kind of rhetorical device (Edwards et al., 1995). In this instance such a reality is that of children living with their grandparents - rather than their fathers - when a mother is absent. In utilising this kind of rhetoric the listener remains unaware of how the speaker structures her feelings around the parental aptitude of single fathers, and instead the reality which she evokes attempts to answer this in a tangible, or ‘furniture’ fashion. Responding in this manner acts to attribute P6's response to external reality rather than subjectivity, thereby lending the discourse a rhetorical robustness and establishing the inadequacy of fathers as a kind of objective reality. It is the robust and seemingly factual nature of this sort of discourse which allows the image of the father as a secondary parent to gain currency within dominant fathering discourse, with ‘deadbeat dad’ constructs discursively positioned as a kind of reality-based truth form (Morman & Floyd, 2006).

Participants made use of a number of constructions to position the mother as an intrinsically superior parent to the father. A mother's anatomy was established as granting her an ordained parental expertise as well as a closeness with her child from which the father is excluded. P6 states that mothers are “unable” to abandon their children due to a bond formed during

pregnancy, thereby establishing the father as a secondary parent before the child is born, as well as entrenching the gendered assumption that children may feel an emotional distance from their fathers (Ratele et al., 2012). The mother therefore has a connection with her child which a father cannot know, no matter how successfully he embodies the good father construct. The mother was also positioned as a more capable or willing parent than the father. In P10's discourse, single fathers are said to find it "hard" to look after children - more so than single mothers - as they are unable to breastfeed and "don't like doing mothers' jobs". In this regard, the discourse establishes the mother as a willing parent who chooses to (and indeed wants to) take on the child-caring "jobs" which the unwilling father does not. P11's discourse also espouses the notion of the mother as the willing parent, by constructing the father's notion of "fun" as drinking and spending time with friends, thereby structuring a father's happiness as distinct from his children. Conversely, a mother, although she also enjoys spending time with friends, is constructed as spending "more time in the house with children" as part of what she considers to be "fun". A mother's sex, gender and psyche are therefore positioned within these participants' discourse as granting her the position of an inherently superior parent.

Although P16's discourse appears to construct drinking as a mark of bad parenting for both mothers and fathers, there is a more critical judgment extended toward women in this regard, observed in her exclaiming "there was, even ladies, drinking beer here... Ladies!". Certainly, by exclaiming - as well as repeating - the word "ladies!", women drinkers, within the discourse, are highlighted and made to seem more extraordinary than male drinkers. Further, by stating "ladies mustn't drink beer, or smoke, that's not good" P16's account expresses outrage at the notion of women drinking beer. However by employing a rhetorical flexibility of sorts, she goes on to state that it is because a woman could be pregnant that drinking is "worse" for them than it is for men (Edwards et al., 1995). As women are not constantly pregnant, discursively summoning the image of women drinking during pregnancy attempts to legitimise the claim that women - as the better, more responsible parent - should not drink. This then forms a contrast to the image of the drinking father, whose gender traditionally encourages excessive alcohol consumption (Miller, 2011; Roy & Dyson, 2010), and the father's poor parenting becomes attached to his 'maleness'.

P6's discourse also attempts to establish a mother's superior parenting as an innate part of her gender construct by stating that fathers do not have "time to spend with their children" as a

result of their working in the week – a requirement of traditional masculine constructs. A schism between mothering and fathering is created in this sense, as it is implied within the discourse that by spending time with her children, a mother comes to occupy the parenting role expected of her. Conversely, the father is unable to exemplify the childcare which is so central to the mother construct because he is to “work” and embody the kind of parenting which is expected from his gender. Discourse that posits the mother as a superior parent is therefore structured around her as the ordained childcarer (due to both her gender and her sex), as well as the parenting experience gained from this (Lamb, 1986). Indeed, it is uncontroversial among those drawing from the ‘Maternalism as Natural Parenting’ repertoire to state that a mother does not need a father to parent (albeit having both parents present is always established as the ideal), whereas any kind of conclusion to the contrary is arrived at with some hesitation.

*Researcher: And how different is it when it's a mother [as opposed to a father] walking a child?*

*P13: It's different because a child loves her mother more than her father because a mother is the one that cares for her child more than anything.*

...

*Researcher: Does a father not care for his child?*

*P13: He cares for his child but a child loves their mothers and loves their fathers, I'm not saying a child doesn't love their fathers. They love them, but not more than their mothers because their mothers take care of them, wash them, buy them new clothes...*

*Co- Researcher: So mothers and fathers have different roles where their children are concerned, but does that mean that the love is also different?*

*P13: Ja because a mother knows what her child likes and she knows when to buy some clothes. The father cannot see the size of the child.*

*Researcher: If a father had to do what a mother does...*

*P13: A father can struggle a lot because he has to go to work, and when he comes home he has to cook for his child and make sure that he do his homework and sleep.*



**Figure 20:** P13's photograph of a father who is walking with his child.

*P8: This is what I've been talking about, they [fathers in Figure 17] drink alcohol, sit there, like the other children don't know what their father is doing. If a father is here in Western Cape and the children and mother are there in Eastern Cape, like, this is what they do, they drink alcohol, gamble. Like, they are supposed to maintain their children and mothers of their children but they don't just care about them, you know? They just care for themselves. Yes that's why I've taken this picture.*

...

*Researcher: Do you think it happens in {Name of community} where the roles are swapped, where the father would be out working and the mother would be drinking and gambling?*

*P8: No <giggles> you can't see that. The role of mothers, I think mothers love, care about their children, provide. They make sure that we go to school, everything. We say we not abused. And other fathers do that but sometimes they don't, you know? Yes.*

...

*Co- Researcher: I can see you're very excited about it but I can see that it's also gotten you to look at fathers more closely, and think about fathers a little more differently than you did before – say a little about that.*

*P8: Like I don't think fathers play an important role because when I'm at my house I see fathers who drink, go down the street, go to the tavern, like I've also taken a photo of a tavern. Like, fathers who go there, spend quality time there but not with their families, yes.*

As a means of excluding the father from the primary parent role, P13's discourse makes use of extreme case formulation by stating that a child and a mother love one another "more than

anything” (Edley & Wetherell, 1999). He states that a mother is to “take care of them [children], wash them, buy them new clothes” – all of which are associated with the primary caregiver. Children therefore cannot love their fathers “more than their mothers” as traditional masculinity does not encompass such basic childcare activities. In this sense, the discourse acts to institutionalise traditional notions of the emotionally-closed father by attributing paternal distance to the constitutional makeup of fathering (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). Indeed, the father is said to “struggle” if he steps into the role of childcarer (belonging to the mother) as he is unable to engage with ‘new fathering’ ideals “because he has to go to work”.

P8’s discourse draws on the notion of the father as uncaring, which is sharply contrasted with the ‘warmth’ and “care” traditionally associated with the mother. She states that the father is to “maintain” (or provide for) mothers and children, however this does not happen because “they don’t just care about them... They just care for themselves”. Fathers therefore forgo their traditional provider role in favour of “themselves”, which is represented in the photograph by fathers drinking alcohol with one another. Aside from P16, no participant depicted a mother drinking at a tavern; for the participants, this seemed to be an activity associated exclusively with fathers. It would appear that alcohol and positive parenting become mutually exclusive within participants’ constructions in this study. The tavern becomes a symbol of familial distance as well as the conscious selfishness of fathers, who choose to “spend quality time there but not with their families”. P8 concludes that fathers do not “play an important role because when I’m at my house I see fathers who drink, go down the street, go to the tavern”. It may be said that the father’s choice to be at the tavern excludes him from embodying the parental roles expected of him. Conversely, the mother - who is almost never associated with the tavern - appears to always perform the kind of parenting expected of her. Further, it would seem that the discourse provides a stable construction of the childcare roles which constitute mothering: “mothers love, care about their children, provide. They make sure that we go to school, everything”. The specificity of maternity is then juxtaposed with the more vague description of fathers’ parental roles, that is, to “maintain their family”. This vagueness, coupled with the discourse’s construction of the instability or unreliability of the father, allows him to comparatively emerge as a dispensable co-parent.

P8’s discourse attempts to showcase the mother as able to take on parenting roles which the father is not. The word “everything” appears to imply that the mother is capable of embodying that which constitutes childcare, and does not need a father in this regard. The

speaker also states that mothers are able to “provide”, a role traditionally associated with the father, further emphasising that men “don’t... play an important [parenting] role”. By showcasing fathering as an unreliable antithesis to the all-encompassing active nature of mothering, the discourse emphasises the inessentiality of the father as a parent.

By drawing from the ‘Maternalism as Natural Parenting’ repertoire, participants acted to inform as well as maintain traditional gender hegemony. The father is established as unable, unwilling or incapable of fulfilling the childcaring roles associated with and performed effectively by the mother. The father is positioned as an intrinsically lesser caregiver in this respect, which may allow fathers themselves to feel that they cannot embrace the new father construct without forsaking mandatory paternal duties. Indeed, fathers may think that because of their sex and/or gender they are unable to operate as a complete, competent parent, and therefore cannot perform childcare as proficiently as mothers (Dick, 2011). While this repertoire may reflect participants’ real observations of fathers’ behaviour, it also has a reproductive impact. Drawing from this repertoire may serve to suppress attempts at ‘new fathering’, and may encourage paternal abandonment by allowing men to feel defeated or inadequate if they do not embody the somewhat rigidly defined roles expected of them (Roy & Dyson, 2010).

#### **4.6 Fragmented Fatherhood**

A dichotomising discourse around fathering is utilised in much research about parenting, whereby fathers are constructed as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Morman & Floyd, 2006; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). However, at times participants in this study seemed to display an understanding of the complexities of fatherhood by drawing on the ‘Fragmented Fatherhood’ repertoire, which explored the notion of the father as simultaneously occupying both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ parenting expectations. Participants drawing from this repertoire were able to rhetorically blend both ‘bad’ and ‘good’ fathering into their discourse. Although fathers were not always forgiven for ‘bad’ fathering practices, they were understood as needing some kind of cathartic release. A ‘good father’ was then susceptible to drinking in excess, thereby simultaneously occupying both extremes of this apparent paternal binary.

*P2: Fathers take care, some of them do not take care. You see they work and then if you come back from work you just go to the tavern, they don't come home they just go to the tavern and why he comes home, he's drunk. And my uncle too, drinks too but he goes first to his wife and gives her money. Then he buys stuff, like meat and all of this. Then he takes just a little bit of money and goes drinking and then comes back, he's not abusive.*

...

*Researcher: So he drinks but he's still a good father?*

*P2: Ja he drinks and he's still a good father but he's not an example to me. Ja, when you are drunk you are not an example.*

*Co-Researcher: Are you also saying that fathers like these also have another side to them?*

*P8: Yes, both sides, they might be good, they might be bad, no one's perfect.*

An attempted acknowledgement of the complexities of fathering is offered within P2's account above. This father embodies traditional notions of the good father: "they work", "take care", "buys stuff" and "he's not abusive"; as well as that of the bad father: they "go to the tavern", "don't come home", "do not take care" and get "drunk". As this father is able to take on both of these roles, yet is "still a good father", it may be said that bad fathering does not void good fathering. Rather, it would appear that fathers are holistically evaluated, and an understanding of faults is awarded to the 'good father' construct. Similarly, by stating "no one's perfect" P8 attempts to showcase a father's faults as an indication of his humanity, and he is given space to err. Instead of utilising 'good' or 'bad' as a definitive label, the 'Fragmented Fatherhood' repertoire is used to incorporate a more encompassing, nuanced construction of the contradictions inherent within paternal constructs (Gelman & Heyman, 1999).

Although an attempt at understanding the 'bad father' is made, P2's discourse is not entirely forgiving of the humanness of fathers. When he states that "he drinks and he's still a good father but he's not an example to me" P2's discourse - like that of fourteen other participants - is used to condemn a father's drinking. However, here drinking does not prohibit the father from being 'good'. Rather, it prohibits him from embodying the role model construct, which was found in a study conducted by Morman and Floyd (2006) to be an essential facet of

positive fathering. Therefore, those drawing from the ‘Fragmented Fatherhood’ repertoire established a disjointed father, who drinks and is good, who is selfish but looks after his family, and is ‘good’ and ‘bad’. However, encompassing the ‘bad’ ensures that he can never be “an example” which is salient for many participants’ constructions of positive fathering.

Despite showing little empathy toward fathering in some realms, such as unemployment, at times participants seemed to display an awareness of the difficulties and stressors that fathers face. Having children was constructed as somewhat burdensome, and stressors relating to masculinity were sometimes empathised with. It is as a result of such stressors that fathers were constructed as finding a cathartic release in drinking alcohol (a mark of bad fathering within all but three participants’ discourses) yet were able to remain ‘good’.

*P15: Because some fathers, when they come from home, maybe they come from work, and then his wife will ask him to look after the child and his friends say ‘come, we’re having a party’ so he’ll take the child and go with them when he sees his friends drinking and he doesn’t want to drink they’ll call him weak and things like that, that he lets his wife control him so there’s pressure there.*

*Researcher: And what do you feel about that? Is there a lot of fathers like that [drink and go to the tavern] in {Name of community}?*

*P11: Ja, there are a lot of fathers like that in {Name of community}, who always drink and drink and drink and doesn’t think about his family, only during weekends but in week days, they are always there for their families.*

...

*Researcher: And would you say that they’re maybe quite selfish in the weekend, or do you think it’s right what they do?*

*P11: I won’t say it’s a selfish thing because each person has to make fun.*

P15 displays an awareness of the gender-related pressures which the ‘new’ father may experience. It is as a result of this pressure that the ‘good father’ becomes marked by that which is ‘bad’. The father in her photograph willingly, openly and by his own choice embodies the good father construct by caring for his child, however in doing so becomes susceptible to ridicule from other men. Indeed the father is initially ‘good’ as “he doesn’t want to drink” – with the word “want” constructing the father as agentially choosing to take on the ‘good father’ role. Nonetheless, this father is scrutinised by “his friends” on the basis

of subverting the gender roles expected from him and is called “weak” because of this. The father succumbs to this “pressure”, takes “the child” and goes “with them [his friends]”. Where good fathering is attributed to the character of the father, bad fathering here becomes a product of that which is external. It may be said that the ‘Fragmented Fatherhood’ repertoire acts to displace responsibility of bad parenting from the fathers to a vague external “pressure”. However interpreted in another way, the discourse seems critical of the societal gendered hegemony which manifests in this kind of “pressure” and allows bad fathering to take place. By constructing the father as inherently good - done so by only three other participants - this discourse seeks to challenge gendered expectations which may act to stifle the kind of positive fathering associated with the new father.

P11’s discourse is somewhat ambivalent in the manner in which it constructs drinking. Indeed, a father may “drink and drink and doesn’t think about his family”, however later drinking is established as his “right”. In this sense the discourse works to structure fathers as inconsistent - or fluid - parents who drink and therefore do not “think about” their families on weekends, but in the week are “always there for their families”. The father becomes a temporary caregiver in this sense; occupying ‘good’ fathering or ‘bad’ fathering at different times. Like P15, P11’s discourse works to construct an understanding around bad fathering, however P15 attributes bad fathering to the “pressure” related to societal gendered expectations, and it is this “pressure” which is challenged and made responsible for bad fathering. This kind of challenge seems absent in P11’s discourse, with ‘badness’ - represented by a father who is drinking alcohol - structured as a human and perhaps necessary facet of the father. Indeed, P11’s speech seems to allow ‘bad’ fathering by constructing it as “fun”, and a “right” which every father may enjoy. Bad fathering then emerges within the discourse as an excusable and temporary feature of the ‘good’ father, and consolidates these two constructs rather than render impossible their co-existence.

Taken together, participants who drew from the ‘Fragmented Fatherhood’ repertoire seemed to express an understanding of the modern father as a fragmented figure. Although there are considerable expectations placed on this figure, the ‘good father’ construct is able to function despite possessing qualities of the ‘deadbeat dad’. Bad fathering was structured either as a logical result of society’s hegemonic gender ideals, or as a necessary - albeit condemned - form of relaxation for fathers; an expected flaw of human nature. This discursive repertoire established bad fathering as an inevitable feature of the good father,

and may be conceptualised as encouraging or indeed excusing poor fathering behaviours. However looked at in another way, such behaviour is only excused when existing within the good father. Certainly those drawing from the 'Inactive Fathering' and 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoires did not pardon poor fathering within their constructions of the 'bad father'. Thus, bad fathering need not be utilised as an evaluation of the father construct in toto, but rather as an evaluation of his actions. Such discourse allows as well as expects fathers to err; it is only by continually engaging with bad fathering that they become defined by such behaviour, and embody or become the 'bad father'.

#### **4.7 Essential Father Versus the Important Father**

Where the Essential Father Hypothesis proposes that it is crucial that a child's biological father performs fathering activities, the Important Father Hypothesis asserts that it is good fathering practice that should be prized over a child's relationship to the person carrying out such practice (Pleck, 2010). Although all but three of the participants who discussed positive social fathers represented them as effective in their parenting, the biological father was always established as the 'real' or irreplaceable parent. Constructions of the biological father alluded to a kind of 'specialness' which was absent from the discursive constitution of the social father. As a result of this 'specialness', four participants' discourse granted biological fathers a kind of unconditional forgiveness, which was not extended toward social fathers by any of the participants. The social father - although adequate and in some cases impressive - was rarely constructed without reference to the biological father, and in this regard could not function as an independent entity. By continually bringing the biological father into the social father's discursive space, the social father is rendered second best. Ten of the participants blended both the Important and the Essential Father hypotheses into their discourse, whereby the merits of the social father were acknowledged, however the biological father - regardless of whether he played a positive, negative or no role at all in his child's life - retained a notable, yet unspecific, significance to his biological child. In this sense, participants' discourse prized a biological connection to one's father over positive fathering per se, thereby ultimately advocating the Essential Father Hypothesis.

*Researcher: On this one you've written 'a man who can take care of three kids.' So who are these people?*

*P4: These are my friends and they are sisters. It's like, this one she lost her father, but my friend's father, he can take care of her but it's not his child because I remember another time these two [his biological children] were bought jeans and stuff but he didn't forget her [his non-biological child], because she was not his child but he didn't forget another child of another man. Ja, so this tells me that a man can take care of a lot of children. The point is a man, even if he doesn't have children but he is like a father to me, even if he can see these children are like smoking and doing that he can go there and like tell them 'no' and this and they will say 'oh he is a father, he can show that dignity of a father.' So ja this picture tells me that.*

...

*Researcher: ...What about the father that looks after her [his non-biological child]?*

*P4: It's like he is not her biological father, he is not her blood but he can take care of a child even if she's not his biological child, it's like fathers can take care of a child even if they don't know them. And then children must not forget that they have a biological father, it's like I must have a place where I just forgive my father one day. Don't say 'I will never forgive my father' – it's wrong.*

...

*Researcher: And if your father has passed away, what sort of thing does this picture show about that?*

*P4: If something like when you lose a father, you will be like okay, you will remember those things that your father did, like maybe my father bought me this so I'm going to wear this because my father bought it for me, then I'm going to wait for the happy father's day and I want to do something special for him even if he's gone. Maybe I must do good things for this day, even if he's gone, ja.*



**Figure 21:** P4's photograph of three sisters.

*P2: I was trying to tell that mothers should care about their child, and fathers too. Because it is a very important thing to have a mother and a father because if you lose*

*one parent, you just know, there's going to be something wrong here. There's going to be something missing, you see?*

*Researcher: If you have lose a parent and you have a stepparent, your mom or your dad married someone else, and they treat you like their own child, What do you think about that?*

*P2: Ja that's okay because he will be treating me like a child so like teaching me and saying yes to this and no to that, he is teaching me what is wrong and what is not wrong, you see?*

...

*Researcher: And if you've [as a father] had a child and run away?*

*P2: Ja that's a wrong thing and you are abusive, that's an abuse, a big abuse because you are abusing the whole family. Who's going to look after them? Because nobody's going to look after them if you are not there.*



**Figure 22:** P2's photograph of a family where both mother and father are present.

*P15: She says that this photo is almost the same as this one. She wanted to show that this girl, she stays with her father, she is not really her sister, they are like, related and really close so she takes her as her sister. She stays with her father alone and she wanted to show that she can be happy even when her father is not around.*

...

*Researcher: If you just have one parent is that okay? Or is it better to have two do you think?*

*P15: [translates]*

*P14: [responds]*

*P15: She thinks that it's better to have both parents so that she can get the love of her mother and the love of her father and they can be able to teach her different things based on what the mother thinks and what the father thinks.*

*Co- Researcher: Through this photograph what are you telling us about the relationship that she has with her father?*

*P15: [translates]*

*P14: [responds]*

*P15: She says that she wants to show in this photo that this girl has a very good relationship with her father, she's able to communicate with her father, she's able to talk to him about things she would normally talk to her mother about.*

*Co- Researcher: Okay so that's great. What does that say about what kind of father he is?*

*P15: [translates]*

*P14: [responds]*

*P15: She says that this photos shows that this father, he plays the role of the father and the mother and that he can do both at the same time and he doesn't care what people say about him, maybe going buying clothes with her at the shops, so he's playing both roles.*



**Figure 23:** P1's photograph of two sisters.

It would appear that much of the discourse which drew from the 'Essential Father Versus the Important Father' repertoire was marked with a kind of contradiction, which functioned to acknowledge the importance of the social father, while simultaneously elevating the level of influence a biological father holds over a family. The two seemingly incompatible hypotheses are then successfully reconciled by use of contradiction. P2's discourse, when examining the importance of biological fathers, utilises a form of systematic vagueness as a means of obscuring the rationale for such importance: "if you lose one parent, you just know, there's going to be something wrong here. There's going to be something missing" (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The word "something" works to attribute a particular allusive specialness to the influence of the biological parent (without having to explain such specialness) which cannot

be replicated by a social parent. The notion of the biological father's importance or 'specialness' is furthered when the speaker frames paternal absence as an "abuse" because "nobody's going to look after them [family] if you [fathers] are not there" (Edwards et al., 1995). The family is structured as incomplete and helpless if it does not conform to the nuclear model espoused by the Essential Father Hypothesis, and deviation from this family form is established as harmful and "wrong". The biological parent is therefore positioned as a crucial determinant of the family's stability. However, a contradiction becomes apparent within the discourse when it is noted that stepparents are able to do an "okay" job as long as they are "teaching" and fulfilling the parental roles expected of them, thereby advocating the Important Father Hypothesis (Clowes et al., 2013; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It would seem then that the Important Father does not function independently of - that is, exist without mention of - the Essential Father. Although the biological father may not feature in a child's life, he is established as an immensely significant symbol who represents an inexplicable importance - which seems to be attributed to the elevated status which a biological connection holds (Pleck, 2007) - within a child's life that cannot be entirely emulated by a social parent, no matter how successful a parent he or she may be (Richter, 2006).

P4 initially espouses the Important Father Hypothesis when she states that if a man - irrespective of his biological relation to a child - displays "that dignity of a father", he may be regarded as that child's father. Her use of the word "dignity" seems to refer to a base 'fatherness', that is, the core of fathering which may reside in any man who effectively carries out positive parenting. In this regard P4's discourse seems to favour positive fathering over the biological father. However, although her discourse builds on the Important Father construction by asserting that the father referred to in the photograph "is not her [the child's] blood [relative] but he can take care of a child", the biological father - regardless of his fathering aptitude - is not rendered unimportant within her discourse. P4 states that "children must not forget that they have a biological father, it's like I must have a place where I just forgive my father". The discourse attaches an innate importance to the biological father, who is to always be remembered and unconditionally forgiven. By declaring "Don't say 'I will never forgive my father' - it's wrong" P4's account positions poor fathering - performed by a child's biological father - as excusable. Discourse of this nature may act to perpetuate the image of the social father as a less qualified parent, who lacks the innate 'specialness' exemplified by the biological father. Although the social father may possess the "dignity" of biological fathers and is indeed able to "take care of a child", it would seem that he is unable

to entirely replace the biological father. It may be assumed that because this unconditional forgiveness is not extended toward the social father, he is placed under a harsher scrutiny than the biological father and cannot be regarded similarly if the biological father is to retain the vague 'specialness' to which he is discursively attributed.

P14's promotion of the Important Father Hypothesis was not backgrounded with assertions of the biological father's superiority, making it somewhat anomalous among the participants of this study. Her discourse constructs her friend as "happy even when her [biological] father is not around". It would seem that P14's discourse establishes the social father as a capable parent, and as a result of this the child is "happy". However unlike P4, the social father in P14's discourse is not made secondary to the biological father because he does not have a biological connection to the child. Where P2's account establishes the family as helpless without both parents, P14's discourse acknowledges that although it is ideal for a child to have two parents present, such a situation is not essential for a family's functioning. Rather than frame the absence of a parent as an "abuse", she states that "it's better to have both parents so that she can get the love of her mother and the love of her father". P14's discourse seems to reiterate Lamb's (2010) assertion that having two parents is not beneficial because of that which their respective genders are able to offer, or any kind of biological connection each parent may have with a child, rather it is the culmination of two sets of resources which will aid childrearing. The discourse locates the father's significance within his position as a second parent, rather than his masculinity (Pleck, 2010). The child in P14's photograph is said to have a "good relationship" with her (social) father, who is able to perform "the role of the mother and the father". The social father is therefore constructed as functioning adequately without a co-parent or an all-important biological father. Discourse which positioned the father as a successful parent despite having no co-parent or biological connection to a child was utilised by only two other participants, possibly because of the commonplace assumptions regarding mothers as superior parents (Sunderland, 2000), the immense value of co-parents (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010), as well as the popular notion that a parent's biological connection allows him or her to bestow particular developmental benefits upon a child (Sharpe, 1994). By showcasing a child who is raised by a single, social father as content, P14's discourse attempts to challenge such dominant constructions and acts to elevate the status of the social father.

P14's discourse endeavours to undermine traditional masculinity by constructing this as an obstruction to positive fathering. Although each of the seventeen participants challenged masculine hegemony to varying degrees, they often contradicted themselves by upholding particular hegemonies and disapproving of others. P14's account does not contain overt contradiction in this sense. She states that this father is able to successfully embody the roles of both mother and father because he "doesn't care what people say about him". It would seem that embodying traditional mothering roles is often discursively constructed as a source of ridicule for fathers, thereby preventing them from engaging with these roles. For this father however, traditional masculinity as well as public opinion is not structured as essential to his identity, and he is therefore able to successfully perform the roles of both parents. P14's discourse agentialises the social father and the reason that he is able to flourish as a parent is because of his active rejection of the traditional masculine activity expected from him (Sunderland, 2000). The social father as an active agent is able to function independently from the biological father, and positive fathering becomes constructed as that which is taken on, rather than that which is designated.

Rather than advocating only one of the two hypotheses as Pleck (2010) suggests, all but three participants made use of contradiction, backgrounding and de-agentialisation so that both the Essential and Important Father hypotheses could plausibly function. However, with repeated referrals to the biological father's ability to offer his child 'something' developmentally unique which the social father could not, it may be concluded that participants ultimately favoured the Essential Father Hypothesis. Dominant depictions of the biological father place immense worth onto a biological connection, and the social father becomes regarded as a competent yet incomplete parent. Discourses such as this may influence children who are having their parenting needs met by social fathers to feel that they are missing this allusive 'something', and dissatisfaction with positive social fathering may be perpetuated as such fathering does not embody a particular familial ideal (Lamb, 2010; Spjeldnaes et al., 2011).

#### **4.8 Collective Enterprise of Fathering**

Despite the biological father being constructed as ideal among fourteen of the participants, eight expressed the immense value and capability of what may be called 'community fathers', that is, a type of social father within the community who is said to father all children, regardless of his biological connection to them. Indeed, participants appeared to subscribe to

Bame Nsamenang's (2010) assertion that illegitimate children do not exist in African societies because of the "collective enterprise of fathering", whereby a number of men in a community take on fathering activities. In this regard, the collective enterprise of fathering ensures that a kind of omnipresent paternal care exists in the community. Although this study's participants said that the community father was not commonplace within their community, all men were expected to engage with some form of community fathering, whether this was directly interacting with children, or partaking in projects to benefit the community. Participants noted two kinds of community fathers: one that plays a fathering role for many children (typically associated with 'new fathering'), or many fathers who look after one child (associated with more traditional fathering). Although the biological father was predominantly favoured within participants' discourse (as seen by those who drew from the 'Essential Father Versus the Important Father' repertoire) it would appear that children were never constructed as 'fatherless', with at least one man in their lives taking on fathering roles and duties (Clowes et al., 2012).

*P13: If you are a father you must help your own son and in other times you must help other sons, all children, and... when you help your son, when you see another kid, you must say that that is your son. You will think that is your son and then you do the good thing.*

*Researcher: So as a father, must you look after children that aren't your children, do you think?*

*P17: Yes I do think so because a child is a child, whether he is his or what.*

The above discourse positions the community father as an identity and an expectation extended toward all men. Certainly, by utilising words like "must" and "will", P13's discourse attempts to dogmatically fix community fathering expectations to the male construct (Sunderland, 2000). Setting up such gendered expectations assigns a kind of pressure to men, while simultaneously placing less import onto the essential or biological father. By stating "when you see another kid, you must say that that is your son. You will think that is your son and then you do the good thing", the discourse seems to explore the lexical semantics concerned with social fathering. The father is to call a non-biological child, or "another kid", his "son" and will come to "think that is your [the father's] son". Men are expected to perform fathering duties for "all children" (if they are to "do the good thing") and in this sense become

their fathers. As a grown man, all young boys in the community are “your son” and no man is exempt from fathering a child, regardless of his biological relation. Similarly, rather than construct the biological father as capable of offering that which is unique to his children, P17’s discourse establishes the child as needing a universal kind of childcare, and the assertion that “a child is a child” challenges the Essential Father by constructing good fathering as an act that may be performed by any man. Children need not feel an absolute paternal loss in this sense as social fathers are not only to “help” non-biological children, but are to consider them as their own children. Community fathers therefore come to represent a panacea for the paternal absence which - to varying degrees - was condemned by all participants; some spoke of it as damaging, others as not ideal or, in the most extreme assessment, “wrong”. Challenging the necessity of the biological father in this sense raises the status of positive social fathering, as well as displaces the discursive valuing of an archaic, incompatible and overly-idealistic nuclear family model (Clowes et al., 2013).

Although each participant who constructed versions of the community father did so by alluding to his importance in the community, five of the participants stated that this kind of father was by no means commonplace in their lives. Despite this, eight participants depicted men who engage in community fathering as exemplifying care and love for non-biological children in a number of different ways, thereby fulfilling both new and traditional fathering expectations.

*P8: Yes, like in the community he [a grandfather] plays an important role, he’s the man that they know who own a business.*

...

*Co- Researcher: So in the community he represents a father who shows something quite positive.*

*P8: Yes for everyone.*

*Co- Researcher: In what ways specifically besides the fact that he cares for his children?*

*P8: Like he can communicate. Even when kids are fighting he can go there and ask them what’s the problem and he can solve the problem between those who are fighting, yes. Even when we come back from school he asks ‘how was school? What happened?’ Something like that, yes. He’s a great father.*

*Researcher: So he is like a father for...*

*P8: Everyone. Yes.*

*Researcher: Okay. Are there lots of, sort of, fathers for everyone in {Name of community}?*

*P8: No, it's like I said, they just sit in the tavern. This one asks children and stuff like that.*



**Figure 24:** P8's photograph of a grandfather who cares for children in the community.

*Researcher: Do you have a school father?*

*P5: Ja I do, here at school. {Name omitted} and {name omitted}. {Fist omitted name} is my father.*

*Researcher: Okay cool, so you have a school father. What sort of things does a school father do?*

*P5: Like when I'm asking for, like when I didn't have a school lunch then I can go to him and ask 'father can you buy for me something to eat if I don't have the money' and maybe then can buy me something to eat.*

*Researcher: And you call them father?*

*P5: Ja, yes.*

*Researcher: Okay cool, and do you think that, as a young person, you can have a few fathers?*

*P5: Ja, if you want, you can be my father. I can say 'hello father'.*

Two kinds of community fathering were discursively established, each associated with either new or traditional fathering. The first, constructed in P8's discourse, looks at one father for many children. This father "asks" so that he may gain some kind of social or emotional connection with children, and may therefore be considered a 'new father'. The second kind of community fathering, observed in P5's discourse, is that of many fathers for one child. This father appears to embody the provider role, associated with traditional fathering, by buying

the child “something to eat”. It may be asserted that ‘one father for many’ is capable of performing the intangible, emotional facets of fathering which are associated with the intimacy facilitated by one-to-one social intercourse, whereby ‘many fathers for one’ are able to combine their resources to fulfil more traditional, pragmatic fathering duties associated with providing and protecting. Considered collectively, these two kinds of community fathering came to embody the roles of both the new and traditional father, each of which were - to varying degrees - valued by all of the participants. The presence of the two kinds of community fathering satisfactorily exemplified the spectrum of fathering expectations (mapped out most thoroughly by those who drew on the ‘Provider and Childrearer’ repertoire).

P8’s discourse constructs a community father - in the form of a grandfather - who is regarded as a father by children in the community. It would appear that that which makes this man “a great father” is his ability to “communicate”, which is reiterated again when P8 states that this father “asks children and stuff like that”. The community father is therefore not “great” because he is taking on fathering duties (indeed this is not established as remarkable, but rather - as observed in the discourses utilised by 17 and P13 - as an expectation extended toward all men) but because he is able to successfully embody ‘new fathering’ by expressing interest in children, communicating with them, and “asking” about their lives (Morrell, 2005). Spjeldnaes (2011) and colleagues found that their child participants desired a similar kind of communicative fathering, which contrasts with the more emotionally-distant, traditional notion of fathering (Pleck, 2007). P8’s criteria for that which constitutes a “great father”, as well as the lexical semantics concerned with community fathers discussed by P13, indicates that community fathers are considered within participants’ discourse as ‘fathers’ rather than a kind of subsidiary parent. It would seem then that community fathers are held in higher esteem than other kinds of social fathers - such as stepparents - who were largely constructed as secondary, inferior parents by those who drew from the ‘Essential Father Versus the Importance Father’ repertoire.

In a similar manner to P13, P5’s discourse focuses on the importance of lexical semantics associated with the notion of the community father. Where P13’s community father is to refer to all young boys as “son”, P5 refers to all community fathers as “father”. These men are seen as fathers because they buy the speaker food, which is constructed as paternal provision. The speaker considers these men to be her fathers and therefore addresses them as such. Indeed, in

addressing the male interviewer, P5 states “if you want, you can be my father”. In this regard, the speaker agentialises men by constructing them as able to assume the role of community father if this is something which they “want” (Sunderland, 2000). Community fathering then depends entirely on men’s willingness to undertake this role.

Although the collective enterprise of fathering was constructed as applicable to all men by nine of the participants, such an endeavour was said to be performed seldomly by fathers. Although P8 constructs one man as a father for “everyone” (a word used twice in the short excerpt, emphasising the encompassing nature of this kind of fathering) and is able to offer children in the community a legitimate form of fathering, she states that the collective enterprise of fathering is not common in her community. She discursively creates a kind of dichotomy in this sense, whereby a father either embodies community fathering because he “asks” and becomes affiliated with concern for a child, or becomes a “tavern” father who is marked with a similar kind of selfishness attached to the bad fathers constructed by those who drew from the ‘Choice of Fatherhood’ and ‘Inactive Fathering’ repertoires. The ‘good’ community father is therefore positioned as rare and as immensely valued by children.

While five of the participants constructed the collective enterprise of fathering as constituting men in the community offering resources, advice and mediation (in a variety of forms) to children, another three constructed these fathers as assisting in community projects, such as the construction of football fields, churches, and youth centres, all of which were said to benefit children in the community. These men do not directly engage with children as the fathers of P5 and P8’s accounts do, however they are still considered to be participating in the collective enterprise of fathering.

*P12: I like it [the photograph] because most of the children, they play on the street, cars come and they hit them and he [a grown man] thinks that “I must help them to build a [soccer] field and make them play.”*

*Researcher: And this is something that is in most of your photographs, where a father is not just a father to his children...*

*P12: He is a father to all children.*



**Figure 25:** P12's photograph of a soccer field which was built by fathers in the community.

*P3: This church, it was built by fathers for youth. First of all, this church was built for youth when there was gangsters in {Name of community}, it was built for meetings for youth. So this photo shows that that father cares for their children. So this church tells me that some fathers care for their community. This church was built by poor fathers. Some fathers in {Name of community} didn't want this church, they were beating children and they are abusive.*

*Researcher: So the fathers that built this church are not abusive. So that's quite an interesting one because the fathers didn't just build it for their children they built it for all children. So what do you think about that, fathers doing things for children that are not theirs?*

*P3: I think they are doing a good thing for their grandchildren to look after them when they are old.*

*Researcher: Is that a father's job, to look after children that aren't yours? If you are a father you have a job to look after all children in the community?*

*P3: Yes, I think so.*



**Figure 26:** P3's photograph of a church which was built by fathers in the community.

P12's discourse represents the community father as one who takes on the traditional role of protector, however in doing so does not directly interact with children. The man, or father, in this photograph protects children from cars that may "hit them [children]" by building a soccer field so that children are able to engage in a form of "play" in a place which is safer than the street. By building a soccer field, these men are constructed as acting in the interests of all children, and in this way embody that which is expected from the community father.

P3's account attributes much value to the community father, establishing him as caring as well as selfless. As a result of the worth which the discourse assigns to the community father, this father is expected to fulfil the paternal duties which are traditionally reserved for one's biological father. By building a church, these fathers are constructed as protecting children and therefore "care for their community". It seems notable then that P3 adds that "This church was built by poor fathers". An admiration of sorts is attached to fathers who are "poor" yet take the time to protect and build something which facilitates "meetings for youth". Indeed these "poor fathers" are (in a manner similar to P5's account) depicted as combining their resources so that they are able to provide something material, and in this sense the church becomes a symbol within the discourse, representing the community father's ability to provide for and to protect his children. On another level, these men are succeeded as "fathers" despite being of low socioeconomic standing, and therefore may have difficulty fulfilling the traditional providing roles expected of them. It appears that these fathers provide in an alternative way, leading P3's account to conclude that the church which they have built "tells me that some fathers care for their community". It seems appropriate that as the community father does not fit into the traditional nuclear family model, he does not provide in a

traditional or conventional manner. These fathers are admired further when they are compared to the fathers in the community who “didn’t want this church, they were beating children and they are abusive”. By contrasting “poor” community fathers against prototypical ‘bad dads’ who are “abusive”, the community father emerges as even more virtuous. In a similar manner to those who drew from the ‘Inactive Fathering’ repertoire, participants utilising the ‘Collective Enterprise of Fathering’ repertoire understood and, to an extent, empathised with the low financial status of fathers. However just like biological fathers, community fathers are expected to embody the provider role in some manner.

Those who engaged with the collective enterprise of fathering may be considered ‘community fathers’, who focus their paternal energy on community concerns, and effectively embody the spectrum of fathering expectations, both ‘new’ and traditional. Within participants’ discourse, community fathers seemed to occupy an omnipresent paternal space, a notion which was furthered by those who constructed men who assist in community projects, and therefore do not engage directly with children, as adequately fulfilling collective fathering expectations. It would seem then that those drawing on this repertoire, unlike those who utilised the ‘Essential Father Versus the Important Father’ repertoire, advocated the Important Father Hypothesis by privileging fathering over the father (Pleck, 2010). As will be discussed further in the next chapter, this affects the manner in which the South African father in ‘crisis’ should be considered, and is an important point of reflection for family intervention programmes when conceptualising effective forms of paternal care for South African children (Morrell, 2006).

#### **4.9 Concluding Summary**

Participants drew on eight linguistic repertoires to construct versions of fathers and fatherhood. Through these repertoires, participants constructed an agentic father who is able to exercise choice with regard to the parental roles and responsibilities which he performs. Although the father is expected to fully embrace the roles associated with both new and traditional parenting, it would seem that he is predominantly constructed as performing parenting activities along hegemonic masculine ideals. Such a performance was both advocated and critiqued - to varying degrees - within the discourses. Positive fathering was established as an active embrace of parental duty. Conversely, the negative father takes the

form of one who does not spend time with his family due either to a hedonistic apathy, reflecting moral inadequacy, or to his working to provide for them.

Within participants' discourse, fathers were often constructed as too traditional or too busy to embody positive parenting. Such positive parenting was always exemplified by the mother construct, who as a result was established as an intrinsically better parent. However, participants also drew on a discourse which demonstrated an awareness of the complexities inherent in utilising overly-encompassing discursive constructions by recognising a father who exhibits both positive and negative parental behaviour. Such behaviour was never explicitly advocated, however it was conceptualised by some participants as a necessary form of catharsis or coping. Finally, it would appear that social fathers are acknowledged as having an important influence in the lives of children, however they are unable to embody or offer the elusive, non-specific developmental benefits offered by biological fathers. Parenting performed by a social father was constructed by participants as inferior to that of the biological father. However one kind of social father - the community father - was regarded as immensely important and was considered similarly to the biological father in this sense.

The following chapter will provide a summary of these findings and their relationship with existing literature, examine the study's significance and limitations, and offer directions for future research and interventions.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

In this study, photo-elicitation interviews were conducted in an attempt to explore the manner in which Xhosa-speaking adolescents in a peri-urban community discursively construct fathers and fathering. The study aimed to explore the kinds of interpretive repertoires upon which participants draw when constructing the roles and responsibilities of fathers, positive and negative fathering, as well as social fathering. Eight interpretive repertoires were identified and examined. This chapter begins with an overall summary of the study's findings, which is followed by a section which examines the significance of the study, including reflexivity, respondent validation procedures, limitations, recommendations for future research, as well as the study's practical applications in terms of working with fathers and children and the usefulness of making young people central in exploring issues which affect them.

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

This study's analysis identified eight different but not entirely distinct interpretive repertoires upon which participants drew when discursively constructing fathers and fatherhood. Considered in toto, these repertoires attempt to answer the study's three central questions concerning participants' constructions of paternal roles and responsibility, positive and negative paternal behaviour, and social fathering. The various discourses employed by the participants both aligned with and contested existing local and international parenting research literature.

By utilising the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire, the father is awarded a unique kind of familial agency and power. Such agency fixes bad fathering to the father, and renders such behaviour as a character attribute for which he is morally responsible. The discourse ignores external justifications (such as financial strains or pressure related to upholding various forms of traditional masculinity) in favour of a blaming discourse. Ratele and colleagues' (2012) discourse analysis of South African fathers' talk also found a similar kind of blaming discourse was drawn on when discussing fatherhood in South Africa (Ratele et al., 2012). Therefore within the present study, the father remains an object of suspicion within participants' discourse, whose shortcomings are attributed entirely to him, and his context is

rarely brought into consideration. This was similar to the results of Nixon and colleagues' study (2012), which found that the degree of closeness that a child feels with his or her father depends on the child's evaluation of the father's commitment to the father-child relationship. Participants in this study who drew on the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire constructed families as ever-willing to experience a closeness to fathers, and it is up to the father to choose whether or not to reciprocate such familial care. However, the participants in Nixon's study utilised a discourse which awards a form of agency to children, whose display of closeness was not absolute. Those who participated in the present study awarded the father full autonomy, thereby maintaining the patriarchal dominance and power which fathers traditionally hold over the family. As Dermott's (2008) in depth interviews which explored men's conceptualisations of the 'father' and 'worker' revealed, a father's emotional connection with his child is assumed to be an absolutely necessary component of fatherhood, however it is his being open and actively embracing this connection that defines positive fatherhood.

Drawing on the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire extends Nixon and colleagues' (2012) assertion that fathering is socially understood as a voluntary performance. The use of this repertoire adds weight to research conducted by Pleck (2007) and Popenoe (1996), which identified constructions of the father as an unpredictable or inconsistent carer. Certainly the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire advocated, constructed and maintained traditional notions of fathering within participants' discourse. In line with Bame Nsamanang's (2010) assertion, discourses in this study which structured fathers as having the ability to choose to parent act to entrench the notion that producing a child - rather than fathering - is key to hegemonic masculine ideals.

The 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire functions in a similar manner to the 'Part-Time Father/Mother as Main Parent' discourse drawn on by participants in Sunderland's (2002) study, as the father's ability to choose whether or not to parent renders him a secondary co-parent when viewed alongside the obligatory nature of motherhood. Indeed, those drawing on both 'Fatherhood as a Choice' as well as the 'Inactive Fathering' repertoires established the good father as one who agentically chooses to be a parent, a role which is intrinsic to the mother construct, as seen in those drawing from the 'Maternalism as Natural Parenting' repertoire. Parenting then becomes remarkable when exhibited by the male parent, but is an expected and therefore an invisible as well as devalued role of the female parent (Maříková,

2005). Indeed, traditional mothering is often rendered invisible as a result of not being validated as important by society (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). The agentic father within this study's participants' discourse reflected discursive forms of hegemonic masculinity as the father was established as able, however not entirely expected, to take on the parenting roles which are associated with the mother, who was always positioned as the superior, more natural parent.

As a means of positioning the father as a kind of antithetical binary to the intangible, emotionally-orientated nature of the mother, those drawing from the 'Gendered Parenting' repertoire constructed fathering as encompassing a more overtly physical form than mothering. Participants using this repertoire seemed to affirm the findings of both Ratele and colleagues (2012) as well as that of Frascarolo et al., (2005), which found men drawing on discourses which defined fathering along lines of physicality or pragmatism as a means of maintaining, justifying and entrenching traditional notions of the father as an emotionally inexpressive parent.

Consistent with previous research findings (Morman & Floyd, 2006; Sharpe, 1994), participants in this study discursively established fathers as parents for boys and mothers as parents for girls. Mothers were positioned as fit to discuss femininity with young girls, and fathers were to guide young boys through manhood. However, when Spjeldnaes and colleagues (2011) found young boys positing that fathers cannot discuss femininity and mothers are inadequate in talking about manhood, there appears to be an implication that each parent has a relational shortcoming with children of the opposite sex, and may be regarded as parental equals in this respect. Conversely, participants in this study who drew on the 'Gendered Parenting' repertoire (as well as the 'Fatherhood as a Choice', 'Inactive Fathering' and 'Maternalism as Natural Parenting' repertoires) seemed to position the father as a wholly inferior parent. It would seem that Sharpe's (1994) somewhat dated assertion that the father-daughter relationship is marked with an uneasiness or emotional distance was partially observed in this study, however both boys and girls appeared to construct this kind of distance in their paternal relations (Morrell, 2006). The emotional connection which children require from parents was attributed to mothers exclusively, and the kind of gendered parenting accredited to a father acts to preserve an insurmountable emotional distance between him and his children.

As dictated by the availability hypothesis, where financially-secure fathers may be able to embody the somewhat polemic notion of the ‘good father’ (who exemplifies both ‘new’ and traditional notions of fathering and is perhaps espoused most comprehensively in this study by those who drew on the ‘Provider and Childrearer’ repertoire), fathers from resource-poor areas may experience immense pressure in trying to perform these two conflicting modes of fathering (Richter, 2006). This is noted in Kirkman and colleagues’ (2001) study, which found fathers drawing on a discourse which constructed a conflict or a tension in performing both new and traditional fathering. Similarly, Bolzan and colleagues (2004) found that fathers drew on discourses which constructed the ways in which they felt that they could care for their children as highly limited because of such conflicting paternal expectations. As the good father model cannot discursively function without men embodying both carer and provider roles within the discourses drawn on in the present study, men may feel emasculated if they do not provide for their families (Morrell, 2006). Indeed, in exploring the discourses on which fathers drew when constructing their identities, Höfner and colleagues (2011) found that men find it extremely difficult to break away from the provider role expected of them. It would seem then that in this study, dominant constructions of the father as a provider have not been unsettled by the apparent ‘new father’ zeitgeist. Rather, the two paternal expectations - new and traditional - have been consolidated and have both become integral to constructions of ‘the good father’ (Miller, 2011; Ratele et al., 2012).

The results of this study seem to confirm McKinlay and McVittie’s (2008) claim that traditional familial ideals continue to pervade dominant fathering discourse. This study also examined further the authors’ claim that the ‘new father’ has become one of many masculinities which compete for dominance (Young, 1980), rather than a monolithic change. Rather than allow for an alternate way for men to parent, the ‘new father’ - as demonstrated by those drawing on the ‘Provider and Childrearer’ repertoire - has become a mark of a good father, which must be embodied in addition to traditional fathering expectations if men are to be considered good fathers. Despite the difficult and somewhat conflicting position into which good fathering is thrust by this kind of discourse, it would appear that, in line with claims made by Clowes and colleagues (2008), emotional provision is a duty which is often made secondary to that of material provision. However in opposition to what these authors suggest, good fathers in this study were always expected to embody the new father construct (even if such a role was backgrounded or made to seem somewhat vague in participants’ discourse) as well as traditional roles of providing and protecting (which often emerged as

more explicit and therefore made to seem more important). The use of the 'Provider and Childrearer' repertoire made explicit the importance of both new and traditional fathering, thereby refuting Christiansen and Palkovitz's (2001) claim that discourse intrinsically assumes a father will financially provide for his family, and because of this such financial provision is taken for granted and silenced within fathering discourse. Further, contrary to those who defended paternal unemployment in Richter and Smith's (2006) study, participants in this study established providing for one's family as something which all men, irrespective of financial circumstances, were capable of and in fact - if they were to embrace the good father construct - needed to do. The double bind effect in which fathers were constructed via the 'Provider and Childrearer' repertoire may reflect a broader set of contradictory discourses concerning new masculinities. It may be said that within broader society, these discourses function to regulate men in sharing libidinal labour as more women become central to economic development within the period of late capital (Buchanan & Flouri, 2002). Discourse which emerged from the 'Choice of Fatherhood' repertoire conceptualised a man's inability to provide for his family - a mark of bad fathering within all participants' discourse - as a choice which he has made rather than a circumstantial outcome. Somewhat paradoxically then, utilising the 'Provider and Childrearer' repertoire acted to maintain traditional notions of fathering, while simultaneously expecting fathers to embody a second kind of contradictory masculine expression associated with the 'new father' construct.

It would appear that the results of this study mirrored that of Nixon and colleagues' research (2012), which found that children expressed anger when they constructed their fathers as lacking parental effort. This notion of children's anger toward an ineffectual father was explored by those who drew on the 'Inactive Father' repertoire. Although some participants' accounts were structured around what might be understood as 'anger', the inactive father was very often disregarded altogether, as this kind of parenting was to be expected from the inferior male parent. By use of the 'Maternalism as Natural Parenting' repertoire, the intrinsically lesser male parent - or rather non-parent - was compared with the construct of the mother who served as a kind of reliable remedy for the inactive father's destructive parenting. In this regard, the mother is established within participants' discourse as the essential childrearer, and the father emerges as parentally expendable.

Participants in this study who drew on the 'Mothers as Better Parents' repertoire aligned their discourse with the findings of Höfner and colleagues (2011) which found fathers drawing on

a discourse that discursively established the mother's anatomy as that which rendered her a superior parent, as well as Edley and Wetherell's (1999) assertion that mothers are constructed as better parents because of their biological make-up (with references to breast-feeding, pregnancy and childbirth) as well as their gender construct (with empathy and intuition apparently being intrinsic to this). Indeed, contrary to Tamis-LeMonda and McFadden's (2010) proclamation that single-parenting is a task which is inherently difficult for both parents, thirteen participants in this study constructed a single father as finding parenting a more difficult task than a single mother would because of his inherently inferior mode of childrearing. Therefore, restrictive or rigid constructs of gender and sex establish a distance in father-child relations, and prevent fathers from embodying the 'good parent' construct associated with mothering (Miller, 2011).

Within participants' discourse, fathers were not strictly dichotomised as 'good' or 'bad' as much fathering literature suggests (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Morman & Floyd, 2006; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Rather, those drawing on the 'Fragmented Fatherhood' repertoire constructed fathers as simultaneously exhibiting facets of both apparently distinct, antithetical constructs. Drawing from this repertoire seemed to form a contrast to the 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoire, which simplified fathering as either 'good' or 'bad', depending on the manner in which men exerted their parental agency. Those drawing from the 'Fragmented Fatherhood' repertoire attempted to engage with the fluidity and complexity of fathering as a construct in flux (Lamb, 2010; Morman & Floyd, 2006). 'Good' or 'bad' were discursively utilised to evaluate specific fathering actions, and the 'good' father was often expected to, or at least understood to, embody 'bad' fathering to some degree. In this regard a father was holistically evaluated within the discourse and specific faults did not become the basis or core of the father. It is only by continually and frequently exhibiting 'bad fathering' that men came to embody the definitive 'bad father' label. Although asserting that the 'good father' will inevitably contain facets of the 'bad father' may act to excuse bad fathering to some degree, it must be noted that bad fathering was pardoned only when it was constructed as residing within fathers who embodied the somewhat encompassing 'good father' label. Although 'bad fathers' were not forgiven or granted amnesty by the 'Bad Fathering as Inactive' and 'Fatherhood as a Choice' repertoires, utilising the 'Fragmented Fatherhood' repertoire attempted to assimilate the somewhat complicated notion of contradictory parental behaviour into the participants' discourse, and was able to forgive bad fathering when such action resided within those who were

constructed as 'good fathers'. In a similar manner to the way in which the 'Gendered Parenting' repertoire critiques gendered binaries, the 'Fragmented Father' repertoire appears to bring into question the dichotomous expectations of fathers. Considered together, these repertoires - and their resistance to hegemony - act to unsettle gendered expectations which form traditional parenting. Indeed, such repertoires indicate a subjective dissatisfaction with such hegemony.

Mkhize (2006) describes the negative father as one who feels emasculated because he cannot provide for his family, and as result of this becomes marked with violence as a means of reclaiming his masculinity. However fathering discourse utilised by participants in this study did not locate bad fathering within that which men *do*, as the hyper-aggressive nature of *indlavinis* and *utotsi* suggest. Rather, bad fathering constructions in this study were aligned with what Roy and Dyson (2010) refer to as a 'cool pose', and were defined by a father's parental inactivity. Instead of actively asserting one's masculinity as the aggression and violence of Mkhize's 'bad fathers' suggest, participants in this study established the bad father as one that has abandoned paternal duty in favour of focusing his energy on the pursuit of hedonistic and selfish pleasures. It would appear that a father's parental idleness - of which he was either aware or was ignorant - rather than his overtly damaging behaviour was what positioned him as 'bad'. Constructions of fathers as violent were notably absent from participants' discourse in this study.

Consistent with the 2006 findings of Montgomery and colleagues, participants in this study who drew from the 'The Essential Father Versus the Important Father' repertoire appeared to favour the biological over the social father. Social fathers were structured as effective, yet intrinsically lacking a vague and undefined specialness exemplified by biological fathers (Mormon & Floyd, 2006). As a means of rendering social fathering as secondary to biological fathering, all but three participants who utilised this repertoire continually brought the latter into the discursive space of the former. Despite Adams et al. claiming as long ago as 1984 that the nuclear family is a somewhat archaic and predominantly unobserved construct, repertoires such as 'The Essential Father Versus the Important Father' act to sustain the value placed on a biological connection, and in this sense long for an arguably irrelevant, unrealistic ideal. However, this study seemed to refute Adams' - as well as Dermott's (2008) - claim that the nuclear family ideal held greater relevance to the middle class, as participants in this study were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, yet their discourse placed immense

value on this kind of family form. It would seem that Clowes and colleagues' (2008) assertion that the social father holds a significant and important place in South African society was only partially reiterated in this study's results. Although the participants' discourse did attribute some kind of value to the social father, this type of father - no matter how successful a father he may be - was unable to surpass or even equal the biological father ideal propounded by dominant hegemonic fathering discourse (Ratele et al., 2012; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

Despite social fathers being regarded as secondary to biological fathers, those drawing from the 'Collective Enterprise of Fathering' repertoire valued community fathers (a type of social father who channels fathering activity into community concerns) in a similar manner to biological fathers. Community fathering - an expectation extended toward all men - was constructed as an assurance that no African child may be considered entirely fatherless (Bame Nsamenang, 2010). In this sense community fathering took on an omnipresence of sorts. Like Richter and Smith's (2006) participants, each child in this study identified someone who fulfilled a paternal role in their lives. Participants established a connection with community fathers despite their not having a consistent physical presence in the lives of these children, or having any kind of biological connection to them (Pleck, 2007). Participants' discourse structured these men as 'fathers' – a label which eluded other kinds of social father. Community fathers are expected to perform, often non-conventionally, the same kinds of fathering activities valued by the 'Fatherhood as a Choice', 'Provider and Childrearer' and 'Gendered Parenting' repertoires. It was established within participants' discourse that a group of community fathers were able to combine their resources to fulfil traditional paternal roles, where individual community fathers were able to take on the communicative, emotionally-expressive facet of parenting associated with 'new' fathering. By existing outside of dominant nuclear family discursive constructs, the community father was able to successfully embody fathering expectations in an alternative manner. It would seem then that Essential, Important and Collective fathering all highlight different forms of fathering, but implicitly also connect to familist discourses which suggest not only specific dominant forms of masculinity, but that which family and kinship relations should be comprised of, that is, biologically-related, nuclear family models (Ratele et al., 2012).

Overall, what emerged from the participants' discourse was a fragmented, agentic conceptualisation of the father, who was expected to embody both 'new' and traditional

fathering to varying degrees. Indeed, each of these two fathering forms were conceptualised as different but crucial masculine performances by the father, with traditional fathering usually emerging as the more valued of the two. The agency attributed to the father within the discourse was not awarded to other family members, thereby maintaining notions of patriarchal dominance within the family. The agentic father was positioned as the central cause of poor fathering behaviour and was constructed as suspicious or inferior to the mother within all participants' discourse. Fathering, as well as mothering, was constructed as taking place along gendered lines, with the 'good father' taking on an overtly active form. The father was always conceptualised as a secondary, inconsistent parent within the discourse, and emerged as a less reliable parent than the mother because of this. Although biological fathering was predominantly prized over social fathering within the discourse, the community father - a particular kind of social father who channels paternal energy into community concerns - was regarded in a similar manner to the 'essential' or biological father. These findings seem to suggest that, from children's perspective, there is indeed a 'crisis' of fathering in South Africa.

## **5.2 Limitations and Significance**

There are a number of issues which are pertinent when evaluating the significance of a qualitative research study. The first of these issues is that of validation, which refers to the credibility of a study's findings and results (Seale, 2004). The second measure of qualitative significance is known as transferability, or generalisability, which measures the reliability of a study's methods and refers to whether a study's findings are relevant beyond its sample. Although there are always factors that make a particular setting unique, by taking these factors into account researchers can make judgments about the transferability of a study's results to other settings (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). In qualitative research, transferability is concerned with general structures rather than single social practices (which are considered to be instances of such structures), and aims to describe particular variables rather than a specific population (Gobo, 2004).

As a means of partially addressing issues of reflexivity - a core methodological issue and an important assessment of validity in qualitative research - an attempt was made to cultivate rapport with participants, which aimed to promote a relaxed and comfortable environment. Such rapport was, in part, developed by the processes and training that lead up to the

individual photo missions (Langa, 2008). The analysis itself acknowledges the cultural distance between participant and researcher by attempting an investigation into that which particular discourses may be trying to achieve, rather than aiming to provide an assessment of individual participants (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Participants were performing as research participants in an academic study by an ‘outsider’ researcher, and this performance may have elicited particular discourses to fulfill particular functions within this context.

Eight months after the penultimate group meeting, participants were asked - in an attempt to explore the validity as well as the credibility of the findings - to attend a final meeting in which they had an opportunity to critique, challenge or support various interpretations of their talk (Silverman, 2012). This gave participants a chance to react to interpretations of the data, which is an important facet of qualitative validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). After each of the eight interpretive repertoires was explained in detail to the participants, the group was invited to evaluate how they felt about these interpretations of the data. Participants seemed largely to agree with how their talk was interpreted, albeit some repertoires appeared to resonate more strongly than others. For example, ‘Maternalism as Natural Parenting’ was a repertoire with which all participants appeared to agree, whereas the ‘Fragmented Fatherhood’ repertoire evoked a somewhat ambivalent reaction from the group, which is reflected in the analysis of this repertoire. It is however acknowledged that, due to time constraints, participants may have been presented with an overly-simplistic explanation of the results throughout this process of respondent validation. Added to this, participants may have been too overwhelmed or intimidated to overtly challenge the results that were presented to them during this process.

A noted contradiction within this study may be noted with regards to Photovoice as participatory action research, and the manner in which participants in this study were subjects, albeit engaged an agentic, however not in the agentic framework envisioned by Photovoice. Although participants did possess a degree of ownership and control within knowledge-making processes within this study (Strack et al., 2010), this was diminished as that that which was analysed, as well as the analysis itself, was performed by the researcher in isolation from the participants. In this regard, the researcher was ultimately positioned as an ‘expert’ rather than as a facilitator, which is contradictory to the Photovoice vision of agency (Gray 2004). The researcher-participant collaboration - a core principle of Photovoice - was only partially achieved in this regard, and it is crucial that future studies of this nature

attempt to address this relationship by working to integrate participants into the research process to a greater extent.

As this study was limited to just one community, future research may explore the transferability of these findings with regard to other communities in South Africa (Gray, 2004). By examining a number of communities which range in socioeconomic status, various similarities and differences of fathering constructions between a range of South African children may become apparent. It is imperative to note the importance of understanding how 'race' and class may intersect with gender to influence constructions of fatherhood (Spjeldnaes et al., 2011). The use of intersectionality theory, which refers to the manner in which the intersection of social categories forms specific experiences, may enhance future studies' understanding and conceptualisation of fatherhood (Syed, 2010). A larger, longitudinal study may also enable the exploration of transitions in parent-child relations (Nixon et al., 2012). With Photovoice studies not requiring literacy from its participants (Gant et al., 2009), future research could include children who are not enrolled in school, as well as specific groups of children such as those who are physically or mentally handicapped. With Dermott (2008) positing that motherhood and fatherhood reciprocally construct one another, fathering research which focuses on the views of children could perhaps also concentrate on constructions of mothers in an attempt to gain a broader understanding of children's parenting discourses. Finally, the exploratory nature of this study highlighted the significance of community fathers. It is therefore important for future research to examine further the critically under-researched notion of community fathering as a means of unlocking the bi-directional benefits of positive fathering behavior (Pleck, 2007).

Noting a study's limitations is a good measure of assessing its transferability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). A number of limitations were inherent within this research. By utilising purposive sampling, the study examined participants who were thought to be 'suitable' (that is, those who are engaging, lively, and academically competent) by their teachers. It is acknowledged that this particular kind of participant would likely produce particular kinds of discourse. The small sample also made for an exploratory micro-analysis, and although generalisability is not necessarily a central aim of discursive research, it is unclear how common these sorts of constructions are throughout similar communities (Gray, 2004). Although most participants could speak English with exceptional fluency - with a translator present for those who could not - it is important to note that English was a second language

for all of the participants in this study, thereby hindering their discursive expression. Added to this, there are many cultural norms and customs which may - despite my best efforts - be misunderstood or misinterpreted, inevitably leading to less reliable data.

Further limitations relate to the use of the Photovoice and photo-elicitation techniques. For example, the images shown to participants during their photography training may have influenced the kinds of photographs which they decided to capture on their photo missions. Wang and Burris (1997) state that because research reports are able to analyse only a few images - rather than every photograph - a lot of potentially valuable knowledge is lost. Finally, although Photovoice is able to implement systems-level change, changes related to physical and social environments, as well as policy changes, usually require extensive and long-term efforts from several community members, thereby limiting the social and policy-related influence of this study (Strack et al., 2010).

Despite these limitations, this study holds some academic significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, with relatively few fatherhood studies exploring fathering from the perspective of children (Sunderland, 2000), and almost none from the perspective of Xhosa-speaking children, this study has stressed the importance of children's voices in exploring parenting issues which undoubtedly affect them. Further, by utilising a discourse analysis to explore children's voices (a novel approach within parenting research literature), the study attempted an examination into the linguistic construct of the 'father' by delving into the content of participants' discourse. Utilising a discourse analysis in this regard has potentially challenged the manner in which fathering discourses are conventionally received (Kiguwa, 2006), and provided insight into how fathering is conceptualised by children in contemporary South Africa (Willig, 2001). The study also examined constructions of girls *and* boys, a somewhat anomalous approach within much fathering literature which has predominantly utilised male participants, with the implication that fathers are more pertinent parents for boys. While acknowledging the significant differences within gendered constructions of fathers, the study's consideration of boys and girls hopes to highlight the importance of the father as a parent, rather than one who performs hegemonic gendered parenting. Finally, the study began to interrogate the role of the social father who, despite retaining a particular prevalence and relevance in South Africa, has been largely ignored in fathering research (Dermott, 2008).

This study also held a particular pragmatic relevance. By utilising the photo-elicitation interview methodology, these findings contribute to the growing field of research which attends to the disenfranchised members of society who are so often ignored in research. In this regard the study hopes to have been an empowering experience for the participants (Suffla et al., 2012). Partaking in studies such as these has been shown to energise participants in advocating change in their communities, engaging in youth activism, working toward improving particular behaviours, as well as promoting a kind of critical reflection (Moletsane et al., 2009; Strack et al., 2010). As Dunn (2004) highlights, there is an emerging interest in children's interpretation of events as a means of structuring various parenting programmes. This study may then be important in configuring and informing family strengthening interventions within this community, as discussed below.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Although no participant approved of paternal abandonment, this was positioned as a common or normalised part of fatherhood, and emerged as a legitimate alternative to positive fathering within the discourse. Perhaps if that which is considered 'good fathering' was given a wider constructive range, fathers may be able to embody paternal duty in a manner which is realistically attainable as well as appreciated and valued by children. It is rare that fatherhood programmes explore or recognise that which a father is able to contribute to the family beyond finances (Roy, 2004). It is therefore suggested that family intervention and parenting programmes focus on developing - in conjunction with each member of the family, especially children - a more inclusive construction of positive fathering, which appreciates myriad fathering forms. Such a construction may render abandonment, inactivity or a 'cool pose' less likely reactions to the difficult expectations placed on men by such rigid expectations (Roy & Dyson, 2010), as a variety of appreciated positive fathering forms may become available. Policies may also be designed in a manner which promotes paternal involvement on many levels and in this regard embolden a less limiting range of fathering practices. In this sense, facets of both 'new' and traditional fathering may be encouraged, with legislative policy not favouring one kind of fathering over the other. A more fluid construction of paternal roles may also act to address gendered power dynamics within the family unit. Indeed such policy needs to be sensitive to the myriad forms of fathering (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). With motherhood constructed as obligatory and fatherhood as optional in much of the discourse drawn on by participants in this study (most notably by use of the 'Fatherhood as a Choice'

and 'Inactive Father' repertoires), fathers are awarded a familial power which mothers are not. Such power acts to paradoxically negate parental responsibility from the father, while maintaining patriarchal dominance within the family. A more encompassing construct of positive fathering may act to unsettle gendered parenting dynamics, thereby displacing or leveling some of the unequal paternal power dynamics within families. Thus the results of this study emphasise the importance of Montgomery and colleagues' (2006) call for fatherhood programmes to develop a language which addresses the unrealistic expectations surrounding fathering by way of exploring a more encompassing, attainable construct of 'fathering'.

Fathering, especially in low-income communities, takes on many forms (Lamb, 2010; Ratele et al., 2012), and discourses which construct fathering along irrelevant Northern or classist ideals may act to disappoint families as well as discourage fathers who do not embody both the (somewhat conflicting) new and traditional paternal ideals (Morrell, 2006). Indeed, much of the discourse which participants utilised in this study acts to stagnate or prevent fathers from embracing non-traditional fathering forms and urges them to remain a distanced, backgrounded, or secondary parent (Dick, 2011). By constructing the father as a secondary parent, men may feel a natural kind of parental inadequacy, deferring childrearing responsibility to mothers, or come to abandon their parental post altogether (Sunderland, 2000). A less-gendered construction of fathering would perhaps allow for an appreciation of different kinds of fathering. Community parenting programmes which promote childrearing along less strictly gendered lines may dispel the construction of the father as an intrinsically lesser parent, and allow families to feel that the male parent is able to offer an equivocal form of parenting to the mother. Added to this, an encompassing construction of 'good fathering' - which appreciates positive paternal behaviour in myriad forms - may simultaneously act to contest the valuing of a middle-class or Northern paternal ideal (exemplified in the biological provider and part-time carer nuclear model of fathering) and to promote a critical understanding of genuinely poor or destructive fathering. Dominant and potentially self-fulfilling discourses propelling the image of the 'deadbeat dad' could be somewhat quelled in this sense, as the father who is largely absent may not always be understood as one who is unable to father. By allowing positive fathering constructs to take on a number of guises, fathers themselves may feel that good parenting is attainable (Khunou, 2006; Montgomery et al., 2006).

Participants in this study constructed social fathers as secondary to biological fathers. Such a construction may allow children to feel dissatisfied with positive social fathering, despite this kind of father being immensely commonplace in South Africa (Clowes et al., 2013). There are a number of developmental deficits that are noted when one feels that he or she is not being adequately fathered (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Pleck, 2007). Although participants' discourse valued community fathering and expected this from all men, the social father was - for the most part - disregarded within the discourse. If community programmes were to emphasise the value inherent within social fathering, and to highlight ways of performing social fathering, the high levels of paternal non-residence may begin to be addressed in a manner which is both plausible as well as appreciated by children, all while disrupting the unrealistic - yet commonplace - idealisation of the nuclear family. It seems important then to conceptualise, advocate, and examine further community fathering as an influential catalyst in improving the perceived parental status of the social father. It is suggested then that parenting programmes within the community should work on developing an alternative kind of discourse which shifts focus from the Essential Father and considers the value inherent within other kinds of social fathering.

With the above recommendations still somewhat endorsing a gendered framework of parenting, it may be argued that the binarism of gender and patriarchy is so deeply woven into dominant constructions of fatherhood that in order to meaningfully address men's relationship to parenting, and indeed to address gender justice more broadly, it is the binarism of motherhood/fatherhood as well as the underlying binarism of masculinity/femininity in which it is embedded, which must be deconstructed. These two rigid and inflexible notions of parenting must be challenged by parenting programmes, as well as media depictions. Although these are being challenged in some societies, seen in the legislation of gay marriage, the growing rates of adoption by gay couples, and the growing voice of LGBTI communities, there is still much work to be done here.

Finally, it may be said that the results of this study have indicated the importance of the neglected voices of children within fathering research. It is essential to incorporate the discursive constructions of children within programmes which promote positive fathering, and to centralise the voices of young people within studies which explore that which directly affects them (Roy & Dyson, 2010). Parental intervention programmes should be seen as a collaborative initiative between children and parents, where a dialogue is created in an

attempt to address as well as understand various issues in this regard. It is hoped that this study has highlighted the importance of young people's voices in recognising the complex discursive space in which the South African father finds himself.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Owing to a number of historical and economic factors, the South African father is undergoing what is being called a 'crisis' (Morrell, 2006). International and local fathering and fatherhood studies have largely ignored the voices of children, and it is unclear how young people in South Africa experience the father, and indeed if they assess such a figure as being 'in crisis' (Sunderland, 2000). It is hoped that this study has highlighted the rich and important data that children are able to provide in this regard. The voices of children must be considered if parenting programmes are to be developed in a meaningful and effectual manner. The aims of this study were to examine and interrogate the manner in which Xhosa-speaking adolescents in a peri-urban community discursively construct fathers and fathering. All discourse was elicited through semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews. A discursive psychology analysis was utilised to identify eight interpretive repertoires upon which participants drew. These repertoires were utilised in a manner that was both consistent with and divergent from previous international and local research findings.

It would seem that despite references to the high prevalence of *biological* father absence within the discourse, no participant in this study felt that he or she did not have some kind of father - or a sense of being fathered - in their lives. Certainly, participants' discourses were not uncritical of fathers, and a number of quite rigid constructions regarding how his paternal responsibilities as well as how he should or should not behave were noted. Participants were discerning with regards to the kind of social father which they accepted as a 'father'. With little or vague rationalisation given to the biological father's 'specialness' within participants' discourse, it may be argued that the crisis of South African fathering alluded to within the discourse is a product of a hyper-idealistic, gendered, classist conceptualisation of the nuclear family as an essential family form (Ratele et al., 2012). This archaic notion of the nuclear family as idyllic allows children to feel that they are missing 'something' even if they are receiving adequate social fathering. It is therefore important for family intervention programmes to work on displacing the notion of the essentialised nuclear family as the standard - or most effective - family form, thereby enabling various fathering forms,

recognising parental efforts of both biological and social fathers, and working to address unequal gendered power relations within the family. In this sense a spectrum of fathering - both 'new' and traditional - performed by biological and social fathers may be valued, thereby diminishing the hierarchy or binary of fathering forms, and allowing fathers to feel both involved and adequate. It is important that the meaning and consequences of paternal involvement are understood by all family members (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001).

Finally, the notion of the community father emerged as important within participants' discourse, however this issue was examined briefly as it was only part of this study's research aims. This study has therefore begun an inquisition into a kind of social fathering which is valued by South African children, and it is hoped that future studies will examine the community father further, and consider this father as important with regard to developing fatherhood programmes, legislative policy, as well as positive father-child relations.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PARTICIPANT ASSENT FORM**



**ASSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**The Medical Research Council-University of South Africa Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU) and the University of Cape Town are doing a research project about what being a father means in the community.**

**What is this study about?**

Teenagers don't often get a chance to tell adults what they really think about things! This project is interested in hearing about how you see the role of fathers in the lives of young people in your community.

**Do I have to take part?**

You have been chosen by community leaders to take part in this study. But you do not have to take part in it if you do not want to. And if you decide to join, you can stop taking part at any time. You will not get into trouble if you do not want to be part of this project.

**What do I have to do?**

If you take part in the project, this is what you will have to do:

- 1) Meet 5 times with researchers from SAPPRU and the University of Cape Town, and with a small group of other teenagers from the community. The meetings will be after school at a time that we all agree on. The meetings will be held at one of the schools in the community but will not be attended by any of the school staff. The meetings will be about 90 minutes long. There will be snacks and cool drinks at all the meetings.

- 2) Listen to some ideas spoken about in the photography training about how to take good photographs. The photography training will be in one of the meetings and will show you some good photography tricks.
- 3) Take some photographs to show the researchers how you see the role of fathers in the lives of young people in your community. You will do this after school hours and on weekends or public holidays. You will be given a free disposable camera (this is a camera that you throw away after you have finished using it). The researchers will pay for printing the photographs after you have taken them.
- 4) Tell the researchers and the other members of the group about the photographs you took. What you tell us about the photographs will be used by the researchers to help them understand how young people see the role of fathers in the community, and to create programmes that can help to strengthen the relationships between teenagers and fathers.
- 5) If you want to, you can choose to show your photographs at a community event to be held later this year, so that everyone can see them. But you can choose NOT to show your photographs if you do not want to.

### **Will what I say be kept private?**

Everything you say in the group meetings will be heard by the other group members. Group meetings will also be recorded on a digital audio recorder and then saved on a computer where it will be stored securely with a password. The stories you tell us about your photographs may be used in the reports that the researchers write or present for other researchers, but your real name will not be used. And if you decide to show your photos at a community event, you do not need to put your name on them if you do not want to.

### **Who will the photographs belong to?**

You will be able to keep a copy of all your photographs. If you agree to take part in this study, this means that you agree to also let the researchers use a copy of your photographs in the reports that they write or present for other researchers. But your real name will not be used with your photographs. If we want to use a copy of your photographs for anything else, we have to get your permission.

### **Why should I take part in this study?**

This is a chance for you to express your opinions about things that are important to you in your community. Your opinions will help us to think of ways that we can help to develop better relationships between teenagers and fathers. It is also a chance for you to learn more about taking photographs and how to use photographs to tell a story.

**If you would like to be part of the research project, please sign this form below:**

**Name:**.....

**Signature:**.....

**Thank you!**



**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

## APPENDIX B

### PARENT CONSENT FORM



#### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Parent,

The Medical Research Council - University of South Africa Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU) and the University of Cape Town are conducting a research study with teenagers in the community. The aim of the study is to hear what teenagers think about the role of fathers in their lives. This information will help us to develop community projects that can strengthen the relationships between teenagers and their fathers.

**Taking part in the study is voluntary.** This means that your child can choose not to take part at all or can stop taking part at any point during the study. Your child will be asked to fill in a form in which they will tell us if they do or do not want to be part of the study.

If your child takes part in this study, they will have to do the following:

- 1) Receive some training from the researchers about how to take photographs
- 2) Take some photographs with a free disposable camera (after school and on weekends). The photographs will be printed by the researchers.
- 1) Attend 5 meetings with the researchers. The meetings will take place at one of the schools in the community, after school hours, and will last for about one and a half hours each. The meetings will be tape recorded. Snacks and cooldrinks will be provided.

If you give permission for your child to take part in this project, this mean that you agree that their photographs (but not their names) can be used by the researchers for research reports and for research publications or presentations. If the researchers want to use the photographs for any other purposes, you and your child both need to give permission.

If you **agree** that your child can take part in this project, please fill in below:

Your child's name and surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name and surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions please contact **Mr Samed Bulbulia on (021) 938-0534 or 082 4671158**



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## APPENDIX C

### Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

#### 1. Content

- Describe what is happening in the photograph.
- Who/what are the people/things?
- Where was this taken?

#### 2. Meaning

- Why did you choose/take this photograph?
- What does this says about fathers in your community?
- What does this say about the lives of people in your community?
- Do you like what you have photographed? Why?

#### 3. Fathers

- What story does this photograph tell us about fathers?
- How does this relate to how you feel about fathers?

**APPENDIX D**  
**Transcription Notation**

**[...] – Words omitted.**

**{...} – Name omitted for anonymity.**

**<...> – Giggling or laughter.**