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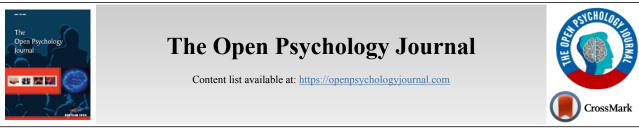Content list available at: https://openpsychologyjournal.com

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Experiences of Black South African Single Fathers

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Abstract:

Objective:

This study aimed to bridge the gap in the literature on parenting by investigating the experiences of Black single fathers living in Johannesburg, who raise children on their own.

Methods:

Social constructivism and critical theory served as theoretical frameworks, while narrative interviews were used to collect data. The study involved seven Black male participants, who were selected using a snowball sampling method. Dialogical analysis and Bamberg's little story approach were used to analyse the data collected.

Results:

Two themes emerged from the thematic analysis: parenting as a single father and life beyond single fatherhood. The study's objectives were integrated into the discussion of themes and subthemes that emerged.

Conclusion:

The study results revealed that, contrary to the common narrative, not all Black fathers are absent. In addition, it pointed to the fact that single fathers are also capable of being effective parents. However, it was discovered that children benefit the most from the active involvement of both parental figures. Implications for these findings and recommendations for future studies were also discussed.

Keywords: Manhood, Fatherhood, Single fathers, Black fathers, Bamberg's little story approach, Democratization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the democratization of South Africa, great attention has been directed toward single motherhood and the challenges that mothers face in raising children alone [1 - 14]. This is partly due to the rise in trends, both globally and in South Africa, regarding households run by single mothers [1, 2, 6, 7]. One reason for such an increase in attention to single mothers has been the prevalence of the absence of fathers [7, 8, 15, 16]. According to Posel and Dewey [17], South Africa has the second highest rate of father absence in Africa. Findings reported by Van den Berg [8] showed that more than 40% of households in South Africa are run by single mothers compared to only 3% of those run by single fathers. According to Statistics South Africa [18], Black Africans are among the

most affected, with about 41.92% of reported absent fathers in households. Another study by Heartlines [19] reported that co-residence data from Statistics South Africa revealed that 36% of children live with their biological mothers in the same household, 34% live with both biological parents, and only 2% live with their biological fathers. The increase in studies on single mothers' experiences, predominantly Black single mothers, might also be contributing to the predominant negative perception and the demonisation of Black fathers, who are often described in the literature and the media as absent and uninvolved [20, 21]. Therefore, understanding the experiences of single fathers in South Africa is crucial as it allows for a critical assessment of the extent to which reported experiences align with or contradict commonly held views about Black men both in South Africa and globally.

Many studies have been conducted on father absence and its related consequences [7, 8, 16, 18, 22]. However, very little is still known about fathers' involvement in raising their

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children, especially as single fathers [2, 4, 23 - 25]. For this article, single fatherhood only included biological fathers who were raising their children on their own due to the death of their partner, separation, or divorce [24, 26]. However, we are aware that in traditional African societies, the status of 'father' is not limited to the biological process, but this may refer to other male figures, such as grandfathers, uncles, brothers, *etc*., who may fulfill a role of care, protection, and provision in relation to 'children' [8, 25, 27, 28]. This study only focused on single fathers and their experiences of fatherhood to enrich the currently existing literature [14, 29 - 32].

Furthermore, various benefits of fathers' involvement have been reported in the literature. These include improved behavioural, cognitive, and socioemotional development in children, increased child tolerance for stress, less depressive symptoms and higher academic performance, and improved postnatal mental health for the mother [19, 25, 33, 34]. Other benefits include children's increased empathy, self-esteem, and social competence [7, 23]. Involved fathers have also been reported to be healthier than those not involved in raising their children [23, 35, 36].

Other topics related to fatherhood reported in the literature include the interconnection of manhood and fatherhood, fatherhood practices, and parenting [33, 37 - 41]. In many cultures, including in South Africa, becoming a father is still perceived to be a rite of passage into manhood [27, 28], despite a reported increase in the adoption of progressive attitudes and beliefs on manhood post-apartheid [41]. Furthermore, fatherhood is still understood in terms of the role played by men, which often relates to traditional gender stereotypes and African parenthood practices [19, 41]. For example, men and women are still expected to conform to traditional gender roles, with women's identity centred around their ability to give birth and be primary caregivers, even when they are employed. On the other hand, men's identity is still centred around their ability to provide financially [19].

Another body of research to consider in the context of our current study is parenting practices, especially in the African context. Studies on Baumrind and Maccoby and Martin's parenting styles have yielded mixed findings on children of different cultural and racial groups [38, 42]. While some studies have argued that collectivistic societies, such as African societies, tend to emphasise the use of authoritarian parenting styles [38], recent studies have challenged these notions and argued otherwise [39]. In addition, studies that have argued that collectivistic societies often exhibit authoritarian parenting styles may often assume that the use of increased control is always negative regardless of the context. These studies often overlook the impact of western socialisation on parenting practices in non-western societies and the diversity of family structures within non-western societies, such as in South Africa. Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the influence that living in a collectivistic society may have on a child's upbringing, it is also important to avoid polarising parenting styles based on "western" or "non-western" narratives. Moreover, such polarisation often tends to position western notions of parenting as "better" than non-western and may overlook positive aspects that have been reported about

parenting styles perceived as non-western [39]. Therefore, this study serves to add to the literature on gender and establish whether and to what extent gender stereotypes and traditional notions of parenthood in African societies are reflected in participants' experiences.

Moreover, current research on manhood and masculinity was also discussed in our study. These include research on hegemonic, hybrid, and Black masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is a term coined by Cornell [43] and refers to an "ideal" form of masculinity. Contrary to Cornell's initial assertion, further research has revealed more than one form of hegemonic masculinity [44]. These are often informed by gender ideologies and involve the attribution of gender roles based on biology [45, 46]. The performance of hegemonic forms of masculinity often reflects relationships of power between men and women and men and men across racial and socioeconomic classes [44]. An example of this is the idea that a husband is 'supposed' to be the breadwinner and dominant earner, whereas the wife is responsible for domestic labour and child care [46]. Hegemonic gender ideologies also acknowledge that gender meanings constantly change over time across social, cultural, and institutional contexts [44, 46, 47]. Moreover, these ideologies are informed by factors, such as race, age, class, and the cultural context, in which individuals find themselves. In instances when a man is unable to conform to the expectations of the hegemonic forms of masculinity within their context (*e.g*., providing financially), they often compensate for this lack by engaging in gender roles traditionally ascribed to females (*e.g*., doing housework), or in domestic violence and adultery [47]. However, due to limited research on single fathers, the current literature has not reported on how single fathers who assume both the provider and caregiver roles negotiate these roles.

Furthermore, research on hybrid masculinities has documented how cisgender, straight, white, middle-class men often engage in non-hegemonic forms of masculinity without losing their masculinity status. Men who engage in "hybrid masculinities" incorporate both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities into their experiences [47]. Hybrid hegemonic masculinities have also been used to discuss the intersection between gender, class, and sexual privileges [48]. These forms of masculinity are often characterised by increasing levels of equality with less hierarchy and include diverse populations of men across a wide range of contexts. Participants in our study can be considered to engage in some forms of hybrid masculinities by attempting to integrate both traditionally male and female gender roles in their experiences as single fathers [47].

Moreover, studies on Black masculinities have documented the role played by historical and structural factors, such as slavery in the United States, labour migration during apartheid in South Africa, and unemployment and low education in shaping Black men's experiences [43, 49]. Debates on Black masculinities are often premised on the idea that there are versions of being a man specific to Black men and draw from hegemonic masculinities that focus on predominantly negative narratives. These debates are also often focused on a history of Black masculinities shaped by

patriarchal and negative stereotypes of what it means to be a man, specifically a Black man. In addition, Black men's failure to live up to hegemonic masculinity expectations and perform traditional gender roles (*e.g.*, provide financially) due to structural factors have contributed to perpetuating negative discourses and stereotypes of masculinity based on race. Such examples include Black men being demonised and perceived as hypersexual, violent, dangerous, irresponsible, absent, in crisis, a failure, and in need of improvement [20, 21, 43, 49, 50]. These negative discourses have led researchers and scholars to advocate for a "new Black man" [50, 51]. Moreover, prevalent negative stereotypes and narratives about Black men have also obscured alternative positive stories and experiences of manhood and fatherhood. The current study hopes to address this problem by highlighting alternative discourses of Black masculinities and parenthood.

Recent literature on Black masculinities has challenged the one-size-fits-all and predominantly negative approach reported in earlier studies about Black men. Social class has been acknowledged as crucial in differentiating positive and negative forms of masculinity among Black men [45, 49, 52]. The extent to which individuals have access to economic and educational opportunities, rather than race alone, seems to influence Black men's choices about which forms of masculinity to engage with. Moreover, Black working men with some form of education often integrate dominant norms with those valued within the Black culture [53]. Participants interviewed for our study were all working middle-class citizens who had some form of higher education. However, the extent to which these factors influenced their experiences is yet to be established through our research findings and discussion. Considering the current context of manhood, masculinity, fatherhood, and parenthood, and after reviewing the literature on these topics, we are convinced that investigating the experiences of Black single fathers is crucial. Understanding Black single fathers' experiences will provide deeper insights into parenting practices and enrich our views of the dynamics within relationships where fathers take the leading role as both providers and caregivers. This is especially so, considering that fathers have often been reported to take a secondary and supportive role in the childrearing process [28].

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on its aim, this study had four objectives to achieve:

- Identifying key themes and narratives based on participants' stories of their experiences as single fathers.
- Discussing how single fathers negotiate their role and identity as single fathers.
- Discussing the implications of the findings on parenting, with a specific focus on differences between raising boys and raising girls.
- Identifying differences in raising children of different developmental stages.

These objectives translated into four questions which were all addressed through the research: 1) What are the experiences of single fathers in South Africa? 2) How do single fathers negotiate their role and identity as single fathers? 3) Are there differences between raising boys as opposed to raising girls? If there are, what is the nature of such differences? 4) Are there any differences in raising children of different developmental stages? If there are, what is the nature of such differences?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Theoretical Frameworks

This study was based on two paradigms: social constructivism (interpretivism) and the critical approach. Whereas social constructivism aims to make sense of the subjective world of human experiences [54], a critical paradigm questions these experiences. A social constructivist approach understands social phenomena "through the eyes of the participant(s) rather than the researcher" [55]. In addition to reporting on Black single fathers' experiences, our study also challenged notions of parenting by creating a space where single fathers can express themselves and become part of the broader conversation about fatherhood and parenting in South Africa. Furthermore, being single fathers sharing their experiences served to challenge common discourses about fathers in South Africa and promote alternative marginalised narratives.

The social constructivist paradigm advocates for multiple realities that are constructed through social interaction and ascribed meanings within specific contexts [54, 56, 57]. In addition, it recognises the influence of social values and subjectivity on the research findings [58]. For our study, knowledge about the experiences of single fathers was considered to be a result of interactions between the first author and research participants during the narrative interview process. Each participant's perspective was equally valid and constituted a crucial part of reality that served to enrich our understanding. Moreover, the presence of the first author as a researcher, the types of follow-up questions asked during the interviews, and how participants answered these provided access to various realities about being a single father shared by the participants. This, according to social constructivism, refers to the interdependence between the researcher and the participants in co-creating reality [54]. This view was expanded on by the critical approach, which allowed us to perceive participants' realities as shaped by interacting cultural, political, ethnic, gender, and religious factors.

In line with the critical paradigm, our discussion of Black single fatherhood attempted to remediate the political, social, and economic problems resulting in social oppression, conflict, struggle, and power structures within various and varying levels of the social-ecological spheres [54]. We also considered how constructions about fatherhood in relation to parenting had influenced discourses on the role of fathers in raising their children. Within a critical paradigm, the overemphasis on the narratives of single mothers was understood as contributing to silencing or marginalising the experiences of single fathers.

Using a critical approach, the historical, social, and cultural contexts that shape participants' stories were considered, and discourses and issues of power embedded in participants' stories were identified [55]. From a social constructivist

perspective, meanings derived from the content of the interviews were negotiated through the interactions that occurred prior to, during, and after them. This was informed by the notion that meaning is constructed through interaction between the researcher and the participants [54].

The interpretivist paradigm uses data collected through interviews, discourses, text messages, and reflective sessions [54]. Data was collected using qualitative methods and analysed using an inductive approach, which consisted of the first author, through thematic analysis, identifying patterns embedded in the collected data in order to generate themes and increase our understanding of single fathers' experiences as a social phenomenon [54].

The critical paradigm focuses on respecting norms within a cultural context while at the same time challenging notions that serve to legitimise certain bodies of knowledge and delegitimise others. In our study, notions that served to perceive parenthood as a role that is only fit for women, as reflected in research on single mothers, were challenged by allowing marginalised voices of single fathers to become part of the discourse. Therefore, by creating awareness of the experiences of single fathers, this study adopted a social justice perspective, one which challenges those notions of fatherhood and parenthood that often lead to the social oppression of the participant group.

3.2. Participants

This study was conducted with seven Black single fathers residing in the Johannesburg area who raised children on their own. The criteria for inclusion into the study included being an adult male, having been the main parental figure in raising a child or children (a boy(s) and/or a girl(s) or both), and living in South Africa, preferably in Johannesburg.

Participant one (P1) was a 51 one-year-old and a father to a 20-year-old-daughter. He became a single father after his wife died due to an illness when his daughter was 13 years old. By the time he was interviewed, participant one had been a single parent for seven years. Participant one's daughter is at university in Cape Town and only visits her father during school holidays. Participant one was employed at the time of the interview.

Participant two (P2) was 40 years old and became a single father after the court granted him custody of his daughter when he broke up with his girlfriend. He reported having been a single parent to a 5-year-old girl for less than a year at the time of the interview. He described his relationship with his ex-girlfriend as distant and conflictual. Participant two also reported being employed as a process controller and living in the Eastern side of Johannesburg.

Participant three (P3) was 54 years old and a father to two adult sons (25 and 28). He reported separating twice from his wife and having been a primary caregiver to his children for 23 years. Participant three separated from his wife, then reunited, only to separate with her again after a short period. Of the two boys that he raised, one was his biological son, and another one was adopted from his ex-wife's previous relationship. Participant three became a single father when his stepson, the

oldest of his two sons, was five years old, and the second one was not yet born. Participant three reported being employed as a mechanical engineer and living with his adult children. He described his relationship with his ex-wife as amicable and is currently in a relationship with a new girlfriend and has a daughter with her. Participant three also lives in the Eastern side of Johannesburg.

Participant four (P4) became a single father after the death of his wife, who died in a car accident together with his mother-in-law and sister-in-law. He was 57 years old and had been a single father for 16 years. His son was 21 years old when he became a single father.

Participant five (P5) was 54 years old and became a single father after divorcing his wife in 2012. His son was 12 years old, and his daughter was 10 years old when he was granted shared custody and became a single father. Participant five was the only one who reported being unemployed at the time of the interview. He was retrenched from work due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant six (P6) was a 49-year-old who became a single father a few years after divorcing his wife. His children were 12, 13, and 14 years old, respectively, when he stayed with them. Participant six reported working as an optical technician and had been parenting for five years. His oldest daughter was 14 years old when he became a single father.

Participant seven (P7) was 40 years old and became a single father after his wife died of an illness. He had been a single father to three children (one son and two daughters) for three years. His oldest child (a daughter) was 17 years old when his wife died. On the day of the burial, he discovered that his daughter was pregnant and gave birth to a child that he also adopted. Participant seven currently owns a small business and works as a personal trainer. More demographic information on the participants is included in Appendix A to provide more details on the sample used.

3.3. Materials

Narrative interviews were conducted with seven participants who all identified as Black single fathers [59 - 63]. In addition, a snowball sampling method was used where participants who agreed to participate in the study were also asked to invite other participants who met the criteria for selection [64 - 66]. Questions used during the interview are included in Appendix B.

For this study, two key forms of narrative analysis were used in combination: thematic and dialogic/performance analyses [67 - 71]. While thematic analysis focuses on the identification and analysis of patterns or themes within the data, dialogic/performance analysis examines the way certain narratives are told, the context in which they are told, and the impact telling the narrative in a specific manner has on the identities of individuals involved [71 - 74]. Moreover, dialogical/performance analysis also alludes to broader cultural and societal issues and how these relate to the narrative being analysed [71]. These two forms of analysis were in line with the aim and objectives of this study.

Furthermore, Bamberg's little story approach was

incorporated into the analysis of themes identified in the interviews. Incorporating Bamberg's little story approach into thematic and dialogical/performance analysis was beneficial as, unlike the above-mentioned forms of analysis that contribute to the construction of a big narrative story, the little story approach takes into consideration the impact that small stories have in influencing individuals when constructing a sense of self or identity [75, 76]. Bamberg's approach also served to demonstrate the interrelationship between continuities and discontinuities (change) in participants' narratives over time, pointed to the self-vis-à-vis others (as same and different) and uncovered how participants portrayed themselves as both agents and undergoers in their stories [75, 77]. Finally, Bamberg's approach was crucial in closely evaluating the inconsistencies, ambiguities, contradictions, moments of trouble and tension, and participants' constant navigation and process of refining various versions of selfhood in interpersonal and interactional contexts [75, 77, 78].

3.4. Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the School of Human and Community Development Ethics Committee (HREC Non-medical) and the Registrar of the Faculty of Humanity at the University of Witwatersrand. Participants were recruited using online adverts that were posted on the researcher's Facebook account and then invited for face-to-face narrative interviews. Due to challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative means of data collection were put in place [79 - 82]. These included conducting individual interviews *via* Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Out of the seven interviews conducted, four were virtual (one *via* Microsoft Teams and three *via* Zoom), and two were face-to-face. All key ethical considerations were considered, including signing consent forms for recording and maintaining privacy and confidentiality using pseudonyms [83 - 85].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two key themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the data collected: 1) Parenting as a single father and 2) Life beyond single fatherhood. These themes reflect the big picture of the experiences of singles fathers related to Bamberg's theory. A chronological approach was adopted in identifying the themes, in line with both a social constructivist framework and a narrative approach to data analysis [54, 56, 58, 60]. The section below discusses these themes and their related sub-themes.

4.1. Theme 1: Parenting as a Single Father

Part of the participants' experiences as single fathers involved managing various tensions between dual parenthood and single parenthood, navigating what it means to parent boys *versus* parenting girls, and reflecting on the various support systems available to them or lack thereof.

Some participants had to be there for their children as a way to compensate for the absence of their own biological fathers, as participants stated:

"I remember I had issues, and my grandmother said, irrespective of whether he is in your picture or not, he is your father! We all brag about our parents. I cannot brag about my dad as such because I do not know him! Like here is my dad. But I do not know him! So, me with that in mind, I got a kid, I got responsibilities, people that are looking up to me, my kid, and my own siblings back home. It made me stronger. And I had no option but to follow that route." (P3)

"I was never raised by a man. You know was been raised by a single mom, we never had a father figure. (P6)"

By being there for their children, P3 and P6 hoped to break the cycle of fatherlessness that they experienced growing up. In addition, participants also viewed themselves not just as victims of their past experiences but as key players in influencing changes to the broader narrative about single fatherhood [75]. This also reflected efforts to challenge negative stereotypes about absent Black men and fathers that are part of the dominant discourse in South Africa [7, 8, 16, 18, 22]. P7, on the other hand, grew up with his grandmother, away from his family, something he reported has motivated him to be a present father. Moreover, P3 wanted to set a new example for his siblings and those who looked up to him. Through his commitment to being involved in his own children's life, P3 was also engaged in the process of redefining what Black masculinity means and reaffirmed that Black parents are just as capable of being involved in their children's life, therefore changing the narrative, as stated by participants:

"I grew up without my father. My father passed away when I was 12. But there is one thing I have learned from my dad. My dad was very passionate about family. So, the family was very important. And that, that has… It was well glued in my mind (P5)."

"But for me, it started from a young age when I wanted to have a family of my own. I did not want to regard myself as a sponsor, whereby I would just send money home. It was important for me to be with my family (P7)."

Many fathers in this study grew up without fathers. They wanted to be good fathers and break the cycle of absent fatherhood in South Africa. These accounts provided a new understanding that goes beyond material provision and includes being emotionally available. Heartlines [19] reported in a study on perceptions of fatherhood that while financial provision was not the only measure of fathers' levels of involvement, it was the primary factor. Ratele *et al*. [39] also alluded to the provider role in their research on discourses of fatherhood and found that the concept of "being there" for one's children also involved providing financially for them. Therefore, although single fathers assumed other female roles in raising their children, they still subscribed to the traditional male roles as measures of their involvement. This also seems to confirm findings from other studies on fathers' involvement [6, 18, 28] that many fathers see their role mainly as a financial provider rather than being emotionally available for their children. Participants' emphasis on being financial providers also reflects their complicity in reinforcing hegemonic ideologies of masculinity that position men as sole providers [44, 53, 86]. This is especially due to participants' ex-partners' reluctance and unwillingness to contribute financially.

Participants in this study acknowledged that fathers need to be available emotionally, but all emphasised the role of provision as the key marker of being a good father, further reflecting their commitment to traditional and patriarchal gender-role stereotypes about men and fathers [45, 47, 52, 87].

4.1.1. Parenting Boys versus Parenting Girls

Participants also reflected on their experiences of parenting boys *versus* parenting girls. Different participants reflected different views related to the parenting style that needed to be adopted between boys and girls. One of the participants shared his views as:

"…The boy, he does not talk. You know boys. They do not have the same emotions as girls. So, they do not talk, or they do not express their feelings like girls…Now recently, I have been spending more time with him, but still, he is not opening up (P7)."

In commenting, "they (boys) do not have the same emotions as girls", P7 seems to allude to more traditional notions of how boys and girls should be treated. In addition, in the above passage, P7 points to a gender stereotype that boys do not display emotions while at the same time revealing a struggle to connect emotionally with his son. By referring to the difference in emotional openness, P7 also supports the view that boys should be treated differently from girls. Research has shown that teenagers' relationships with their fathers appear to be more important to their development and achievement in school [88 - 90]. Therefore, P7's son, being in his teen years, may benefit from a closer relationship with his father, as his father suggested in the extract above to be "spending more time" with his son. This need to treat boys differently is also reflected in P1's struggle to answer the question on the difference between raising a boy and a girl (It is important to note that this answer is hypothetical as P1 only had experience raising one daughter):

"… That is a dicing question… I do not know, but based on my personality, I think I will approach the same situation, the same way it is happening now. I think with boys, you have to be extra careful and very cautious when you are dealing with them…(P1)"

By using the expression "with boys, you have to be extra careful and very cautious", P1 may be referring to the need to use more control when raising boys compared to girls. This may also reflect an assumption that girls are easier to control than boys. Hence, stricter measures may be required for boys. This view also seems to align with research on parenting styles, which suggests that African parents tend to use authoritarian parenting styles [38]. However, further investigation is required to ascertain this hypothesis as there is little research focusing specifically on parenting styles within African households. The available research on this topic seems to contradict the above view [39]. Regarding age, participants shared mixed views on how they treated their children. While some reported being stricter with their younger children, others used more authority, especially during their children's puberty. Moreover, P5 reported being stricter and a disciplinarian when his children were younger to compensate for his ex-wife's permissiveness.

"We would have different approaches, my wife was too soft with them, and I needed to be hard in making sure that they studied (P5)."

In being stricter with his children, P5 reported wanting to strike a balance in parenting, which is often believed to be beneficial to a child's development. However, he also reported adjusting his parenting style as his children became adolescents. This need to use force can also be understood as an attempt to establish a relationship of power between a child and a parent that has been characteristic of parenting within patriarchal societies in which men often feel entitled to having control over women and children [44, 86].

"My son, at 20 years old, he is now spending more time with me. And without any prompting, without any guidance from anyone, he just started saying, I do not want to go to mum, I am fine. I want to stay with you… And we are no longer sticking to those bound rigidity that we used to when we started because now there is a lot of maturity (P5)."

This further reflects ways in which P5 has justified his exercise of power over his son and used age as a justification for his son's freedom and as a rite of passage into adulthood. In doing so, P5 may have further perpetuated discourses that children need to be controlled by adults just because they are children, therefore reflecting ageism [91]. Moreover, other participants were permissive with their younger children, as stated by one of the participants:

"When she wants anything, Whether I have money or not, I will drop everything, make sure that she gets what she wants (P1)."

"I was never saying no to my children. I could maybe say no to my wife but never say no to my children (P6)."

Participants who were permissive with their younger children also reported challenges in adjusting to their children's increasing and developmentally appropriate need for autonomy as they became adolescents [5]. They stated that:

"I remember when she was starting to be rebellious. I almost got physically…I will shout and everything (P1)."

" …a person that was giving me a lot of grief and rebellious inside the house, and she will lay into sleep this time of the day like she will put a big, huge blanket over, while it is 30 degrees outside… I forced her. She went back to school, she did, and she passed matric (P6)."

'Then the boy being a boy, trying to be a man, you know when boys like 13-14… he thinks now he is a man, he can make things move. They did not get along with the stepmother. So now there were a lot of conundrums between the two (P7)."

The extracts above further reflect the idea that men, and in this case, parents, should strive to control their children, even if that means using power to exert their authority. Participants, by virtue of being parents, felt entitled to impose their will on their children, perhaps as a way of enacting discourses about discipline and raising children that they themselves had been socialised into. Research on intergenerational parenting styles has shown that past parenting styles have an influence from one generation to another [21]. These views also support

research on parent-adolescent relationship dynamics. The relationship between a parent and their child has been reported to shift during the child's adolescence, with parents often realigning and negotiating the dynamics and offering increased autonomy to the child [92].

When the experiences of participants on how they related to their children when they were young *versus* when they were adolescents were compared, differences were identified. Most participants spoke about being more permissive with their children when they were younger. These differences may be related to both the fathers and the children's personalities and temperament, among other factors that have been identified to influence parenting and the relationship between parents and their children [5]. However, reflecting on their experiences, participants expressed a sense of inadequacy in raising adolescent daughters compared to adolescent sons, especially regarding their daughters' menstruation. While there was an emphasis on menstruation as a rite of passage into girls' adulthood, little was mentioned about boys' process to manhood [93 - 95]. Furthermore, fathers framed their girls' menstruation as a problem to deal with and expressed anxiety in facing this "problem," as they stated:

"You know, the only challenge was when my daughter came out of puberty, when she had her menstrual period. That was my biggest problem… And so, I had to now go to the shop and buy pads for her. And I get to the shop, and I now realize oops, now I do not even know what to buy, you know? (P5)"

"And then sometimes, there come times when somebody asked you that, you know, daddy, I have got my periods. I need money from you. How do you, as a dad, handle it? Here is a young girl getting her first period. I had to go buy a pad (P6)."

Participants spoke of having to buy pads for their daughters as a shameful experience. This attitude toward menstruation may be reflective of broader narratives around the meaning of menstruation as something to be hidden, controlled, and treated in secret [95]. In addition, fathers' shame around their daughters' menstruation could be understood as a reaction to an act of transgression against both the hegemonic and traditional gender roles of men, particularly Black men [49]. In other words, dealing with menstruation seemed to have been perceived as an offence to participants' Black masculinity as it blurred the lines between what is traditionally perceived as a masculine *versus* a feminine task [95, 96]. This is particularly so considering that dealing with menstruation is often considered to be the role of the mother, not the father. Hence, participants may have felt the need to "rectify" this offence by reaching out to women for assistance. These experiences also reflect binary ways in which gender roles are still defined within South African families [19].

Furthermore, treating menstruation as a secret may also indicate to the girls that the very experience that proves their womanhood is unclean and something to be treated in secret. The discomfort displayed in the quote above also reflects participants' treatment of menstruation as a "women's problem" and a taboo topic. This may also limit participants' understanding of this phenomenon and may serve to perpetuate problematic narratives on menstruation and how girls are perceived by boys and men in society. Boys, on the other hand, seemed not to experience any pressure when transitioning from boyhood to manhood. Women also seemed to reinforce these problematic narratives and discourses around menstruation and how men should handle it. This is reflected in the comment below made by P1:

"I remember when she was now moving into the adolescence stage, menstruation kicked in and everything. My sister said to me, you know what? There are things that this child cannot talk to you. Yes… let me just stay with her for that period so that she can adjust. Because menstruation is something to other kids…I mean, you are a man. Then I said, okay, fine… You know… (P1)."

P1's sister seemed to endorse views that men are not "allowed" to engage with their girls on menstruation, a view reported to be common among women, reflecting traditional patriarchal ideologies about how gender roles should be performed [86, 95, 96]. Moreover, the comment above reflects a narrow understanding of roles that men and fathers should play in their children's lives and exposes women's complicity in perpetuating particular discourses about womanhood and manhood that dictate what men and women "should" and "should not" do [53]. Furthermore, it reflects the idea that just because women alone go through menstruation, men cannot fully understand this experience. As a result, menstruation may have been treated as disgusting, something to be feared and avoided by men and boys, an experience that only the "others" (in this case, girls and women) should be concerned with [95, 96]. Moreover, not only were boys not engaged in issues surrounding their own menarche (spermarche), but nothing was mentioned about boys being educated on the topic of menstruation. This further confirmed findings from other studies that have discovered that women or mothers, more than fathers, function as sexuality educators in the home [95]. Furthermore, boys were reported to use informal and unreliable sources, such as friends or the media, to gain information on menstruation. Therefore, by not engaging boys on topics around menstruation, in addition to treating girls' menstruation as a secret, participants may be communicating to boys and girls that menstruation is obscene, therefore indirectly promoting notions that use menstruation to stigmatize girls and women as moody and difficult to deal with during this period [95]. By holding such views, relationships of power and men's assumed superiority over women might also be promoted, where women are perceived as weak and emotionally incapable because of these unique experiences.

4.1.2. Support Systems

Participants acknowledged the role played by various support systems in helping them fulfill their function as single fathers. All participants reported receiving support. However, the nature, purpose, and degree of the support varied from one participant to another. Furthermore, participants mentioned receiving support at different stages in their journey and depending on the number and age of children they raised. One of the participants stated:

"But fortunately, my mom came, and took my son away from me to go and look after him. And I continued working. I

am telling you, if I start to complain, some people will be by my door, wanting to know what is happening. I am very much thankful, and I am very grateful to the families, my family, my mom, my uncles, and everyone in my family because they are always there; support, help, how do you? (P3)"

As P3 reflected in the extract above, some participants had to temporarily let their children live with extended family members or temporarily live with family members to balance caregiving and the demands of work. This is a common practice in South Africa, highlighting the role that the family can play in raising a child [4, 7, 97, 98]. It also supports the common narrative prevalent in collectivistic societies and mentioned by P4 that it takes a village to raise a child [7]. In other words, raising a child is not just a mother or father's responsibility but also involves family members. Moreover, participants mostly mentioned receiving support from their own family members, as opposed to those of their ex-partners' families, especially for divorced participants. This support what has been reported in the literature and further highlights the role that conflicts between couples can have on children [5, 86, 99]. However, participants whose wives died reported receiving support from both sides of the family. This may indicate that the nature of the cause for becoming a single parent influenced how support was granted. Participants did not only receive support from family members but also from community members, friends, and colleagues who provided emotional, caregiving, and in some cases, financial support during bereavement and the divorce settlement.

P5 prioritised his children's needs and was proactive in establishing measures to prevent him and his ex-wife from using children in the divorce battles. Co-parenting is often more beneficial for children, and this seems to be evident in P5's divorce experience [5, 99]. However, other divorced participants received no support and experienced resistance from both their partners and their partners' family members, as stated:

"But since the child is with me, she is not interested in coming to see her. Yeah, so it is like I am on my own. It is like, okay then, you have got what you wanted; let's see if you will cope (P2)."

"My son was brought to me that you must look after (P3)."

"For years now, I think she still has a grudge against me. We just greet. There was a time we never even used to greet each other (P6)."

In the three cases above, participants' partners left the task of parenting to the fathers. In addition, for P2 and P6, the mothers used their absence as a punishment to the father for wanting to become the child's primary caregiver. These mothers may also have used their absence to test the fathers' fitness to be parents.

"One of the court orders was that we have an arrangement that on weekends she will be with her, yeah, but they cannot go there (referencing to his ex-place). *She can be with her on the weekend… like not there… wherever she goes, you must make sure that, that boy is not there* (referring to his ex-girl's brother who abused drugs). *For some reason, she just stopped coming. So, I cannot go after her and try to force her… there is nothing*

I can do (P2)."

This sentiment was also expressed by P3 and P6. As a result, fathers (P2 and P3) had to move their children between their own homes and different family members' homes. This instability in the home may have an impact on the children's emotional and overall development [4, 5]. Moreover, fathers who did not receive support from their ex-partners reported either financial difficulties or issues with maintenance. For example, P2 mentioned that his girlfriend, despite being ordered by the court to pay maintenance, defaulted on payment. P6, on the other hand, spoke of his ex-wife's lack of involvement:

"So, there was only one income. I did not ask… Their mother never sent money to me… she used to say, okay then, you wanna play the father Christmas, and be the Good Samaritan? You know, carry on… I never picked up my phone and called her for one cent (P6)."

These participants seemed to have experienced financial difficulties due to their partners' lack of involvement. The situation was even more difficult to manage as participants' exes appeared surprised by their ex-partners' involvement and then used this to challenge them to be "real" men and provide. The pressure to prove to their partners that they could provide may have increased the difficulty of approaching their reluctant partners to ask for support. Therefore, the children were the most impacted [4, 5]. Participants' willingness to accept financial responsibility could also be reflective of their adherence to gender norms that equate fatherhood with financial/material provision [42]. In taking on this financial responsibility without objecting, these fathers, with the complicity of their ex-partners, seem to have been affirming their role as breadwinners, hence reinforcing prevalent hegemonic gender ideologies that to be a "real man" in South Africa, one needs to provide financially for one's children [19, 44, 47, 92]. Moreover, issues with support experienced by participants also highlighted inequalities within the maintenance system in South Africa, which seems to operate under the assumption that only women and single mothers need money, not men and single fathers. This issue may have been influenced by discourses that position men only as capable breadwinners and women as recipients of maintenance money, therefore overlooking the complexities and diversities within the modern family structures and the active role that men, not only women, play in raising children [6, 100]. Participants may have felt marginalised as not only are they faced with the challenge of not having to receive financial support from their partners, but societal expectations for them to be breadwinners, and structural barriers that still hold narrow descriptions of roles that men and women "should" play in their children's lives. Therefore, there is a need for the justice system, in general, and the maintenance system to acknowledge fatherhood in an active everyday form and shift it from the provider role [100].

"Absent mothers" were either preoccupied with other relationships or deliberately withheld the necessary support from fathers because of their marital issues. However, P7, who became a single father after his wife died, also reported experiencing challenges with support, even though he quoted

relationships within his family of origin as a barrier to accessing this support:

"They make sure that they respect my boundaries. I take my own decisions, so they do not interfere with that… There is a lot of uncertainty because they do not know what is in my head. I do not know what is in their head, but they are my family, and I love them to bits. But it is hard for them to interfere in how I do things because I had my way or I have my own way of doing things (P7)."

P7's lack of support from family related to his reluctance to seek it and a belief that he can handle the situation on his own, despite the challenges he faced with balancing various roles. As a personal trainer, P7 may have adopted a more individualist approach in addressing his challenges, which may have influenced his reluctance to seek help from the family structures available. This approach to problem-solving could also reflect notions that a man is supposed to be strong and take responsibility, with responsibility in this instance referring to not asking for assistance from others [47]. Whereas other participants referenced family members and friends, he mentioned briefly attending therapy, hiring a helper, and then relying on his own internal locus of control. P7 was not the only one who hired a helper, as P1 also used a helper to compensate for duties that he could not fulfill. However, P7 was raised by his grandmother, away from his family members, and acknowledged receiving some support from her, albeit minimal, as he stated:

"So, I would say the support that I got from her is just making sure that when the kids are at home, she is there, as an adult. Nothing more, nothing less than that (P7)."

P7 added that he would only visit his family during the holiday seasons. This early experience may have created some distance in his interpersonal relationships with family members and influenced his perception of the role that family plays in one's life. Nonetheless, P7's experiences add to the diversity of single fathers' experiences and provide insights into how the men who were interviewed used support differently, despite having gone through similar experiences. Furthermore, participants received support from their current wives and partners. However, like the help received from family members, the help received from partners was primarily with caregiving. This further reinforced traditional gender-role ideologies, which hold that women are meant to be caregivers in the family [44, 53, 86]. Moreover, P6, who experienced challenges with finances, mentioned receiving money from his boss:

"Luckily, I worked for a very good boss at that time, that, sometimes I was like honest with my boss and said to my boss, you know, today there is nothing at home. And my boss would say, okay then I will give you a thousand rand. I will give you a thousand rand just to add up for the girls (P6)."

The extract above also indicates that participants may have felt more comfortable approaching alternative and conventional normative sources of help, such as colleagues from work, for maintenance money as opposed to the court. This further reflected more traditional gender-role ideologies [45, 52]. Moreover, participants and their adolescent daughters received guidance and parenting advice from participants' ex-partners and other mother figures available in their daughters' life. In addition to the support from family members and acquaintances, participants used their religion and spirituality, their own self-efficacy, and physical activities, such as running, as coping mechanisms. Most participants quoted their belief in God as a crucial source of strength and hope in raising their children.

Furthermore, participants referred to the influence of historical, social, economic, and cultural factors in how they assumed their role as single fathers. Intrapersonal conflicts experienced by participants were influenced by the tension between previously held beliefs about manhood and fatherhood and their current and, at times, contradicting realities. There was tension and discomfort among participants, particularly when assuming roles traditionally attributed to mothers. This further highlighted the interrelationship between personal and broader narratives around manhood and fatherhood and revealed a struggle to relinquish hegemonic masculine ideologies. Moreover, the process of constructing a coherent narrative around participants' experiences as single fathers also reflected moments of tensions, contradictions, and inconsistencies in the process of navigating and refining various aspects of their selfhood or their identity [75].

4.2. Theme 2: Life Beyond Single Fatherhood

Participants' experiences also extended beyond their role as single parents and involved their relationship with their adult children, healing from the divorce and death of their wife, finding new meanings to life, and entering new relationships. Participants also reflected on mistakes made during their journey and shared lessons they had learned from their experiences.

Participants' relationships with their children changed over time. While some fathers reported being closer to their children, others said that they experienced distancing from their children. P3 and P6 reported being closer to their sons now than when they were young. Both participants still share the same household with their children. This may have influenced the need for both parties to maintain closer bonds. P3, who now lives with his 28-year-old son, reported that conflict with his son mainly arises due to his need for independence and differences in views, an experience reported to be common among parents raising adolescents and young adult children [92].

"Maybe now that I think he is independent. Because I think he knows, it upsets me that he thinks that he can reason for things (P3)."

In the extract above, P3 also seemed to imply that a child will always remain a child regardless of their age and that a father's views are not to be challenged by virtue of being a father. This reflects patriarchal thinking and a belief in traditional notions of parenthood that confer to an adult man and a father continual power over their children [92]. Although participants did not provide details on points of conflicts between them and their children, some issues that were noted to contribute to conflicts between adult children and their parents include communication and interactional styles, habits

and lifestyle choices, values, politics, religion, and ideology, work-habits and household standards and maintenance [88]. Moreover, issues around adjusting to children moving out of the house or the "empty nest syndrome" were also reported [4]. For example, P1, whose daughter is now studying at a university in Cape Town, reported feeling lonely and anxious about his daughter's independence. He had to initially maintain contact with her through constant phone calls.

"She is now alone on her own. I am no more there… no daddy, she is on her own. That was challenging me emotionally. I would have to call her almost every day in the morning to check if she is fine (P1)."

However, P1 and others who had adult children learned to accept their children's independence and the shift in their role as primary caregivers. This shift in the relationship between fathers and their children also reflected a moment of transition in the family life cycle, which necessitated an adjustment [4]. Participants maintained their relationship with their children through regular face-to-face visits and from a distance. For example, P6, whose three daughters had all moved out of the house due to marriage and work commitments, mentioned talking to his children using Skype during the lockdown period.

"We like to Skype each other and speak over the phone and still have that father and daughter relationship because they were not working far from me. So, Erick (referring to the first author), *I had jobs where they were not far from me… I got them jobs right next to me (P6)."*

Finding jobs for his children in closer proximity to his workplace was another way for P6 to maintain his relationship with his daughters. While some participants were grateful and content with the state of their relationship with their children, others believed that it was still a work in progress. P1, P3, and P5 all reported experiencing a sense of joy and satisfaction in their relationship with their children:

"It gives me great pleasure. It gives me great pleasure that there are people… okay, not necessarily here… out there, even when I walk out the street here, you know they are people that say you have got a big boy? We still walk together, make jokes, we laugh… people admire… (P3)."

"So, I want to believe that the decision I took to be there for them is now paying off. I do not have an alien relationship with my kids… They grew up understanding that, yes, this is how it is. But we still have these two people in our lives. So, yeah, it helped lay that foundation from the onset… I am very happy, being a single father. The fact that I am spending time with my kids, but also, the fact that they also have equal access to their mother, and she spends as much time with them. I am happy. I know it is not an ideal father-and-mother family relationship (P5)."

Whereas P3's sense of pride was from the feedback he receives in social settings, P5 was proud to have had a relationship with his children beyond their early formative years and despite the divorce between him and his wife. P5's unique experience with his children became his little story, further highlighting the benefits related to parents' joint custody [5]. Although the mere presence of a father in his children's life does not lead to effective parenting, children whose fathers are present and involved, have been reported to benefit from the involvement of both parental figures [5, 25, 33, 99]. Benefits related to fathers' involvement include children improved behavioural, cognitive, and socioemotional development, improved tolerance for stress, reduced depressive symptoms, high academic performance, increased empathy, self-esteem, and social competence [7, 33]. Fathers' involvement also benefits fathers. The advantages of being involved in a child's life include improved health, lower levels of depression, and high levels of satisfaction.

Overall, all participants reported experiencing a sense of pride and satisfaction to have been present in their children's life. For some, children were a motivation to remain committed to their role as a father, especially during stressful situations. However, not all fathers were satisfied with their relationship with their children. For example, P7 reported that his relationship with his children was still a work in progress. In addition to challenges in healing from the impact of his wife's recent death, P7 also mentioned issues such as not living in the same city and household with his children because of work. P7 only visits his children during the holidays or at the end of the month and cannot be present with his children daily. He reported experiencing stress and worry about not sharing the same household with all his children. This dynamic may also reflect the impact that cohabitation with children may have in their life.

4.3. Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study is significant and contributed to the body of knowledge on fatherhood in South Africa, it also presents some limitations. A very small sample of participants was interviewed. This means that views shared by participants interviewed may not necessarily be representative of all Black single fathers in South Africa. In addition, this study only included Black fathers as part of the research sample, hence limiting the relevance of its findings to only one racial group, especially for a country as racially diverse as South Africa. Furthermore, only fathers were included as participants and not their children. Therefore, the findings of this study are representative of one group of individuals involved in the process of parenting: fathers. Meaningful insights that children of single fathers may have shared to enhance the quality of the study have not been included, further limiting the relevance of this study. Interviewing children raised by single fathers may provide more information to be compared with what has been shared by fathers in the study.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, this study has been valuable in creating awareness of issues faced by single fathers as a marginalised community and has contributed to the diversity of voices and insights into fatherhood and parenthood in South Africa.

Based on the limitations of the current study identified above, future studies should include a larger sample of participants to ensure that the views and experiences of single fathers are more representative of the larger Black South African community. In addition, including the voices of fathers from different racial groups and the experiences of children from diverse racial groups raised by single fathers will be

beneficial. Furthermore, research focusing on understanding single fatherhood and fatherhood within non-heteronormative relationships, as well as research investigating "Black fatherhood" as a specific topic within the South African context, is needed to deepen our understanding of fatherhood and parenthood.

CONCLUSION

This study was narrative research on the experiences of Black single fathers living in Johannesburg, who raise children on their own. The study was crucial as it allowed for the inclusion of the voices of single fathers that have been underrepresented in the literature and discussion on fatherhood and parenthood. Using social constructivism and critically situated epistemologies as theoretical frameworks [20, 49, 51], the study used narrative interviewing as a method for data collection, as well as thematic analysis and Bamberg's little story approach to analyse data.

Three key objectives were addressed in the discussion: identifying key themes and narratives based on participants' stories of their experiences as single fathers, discussing how single fathers negotiate their role and identity as single fathers, discussing the implications of the findings on parenting, with a specific focus on differences between raising boys and raising girls, and finally identifying differences in raising children of different developmental stages. From this study, it can be concluded that, contrary to the dominant narrative about fathers in South Africa, especially Black fathers, not all fathers are absent. The study demonstrated that fathers are just as capable as mothers of integrating roles traditionally associated with both fatherhood and motherhood. These findings offer an alternative to common narratives that portray Black fathers as absent, irresponsible, and uninvolved in their children's upbringing. In addition, they cast a positive light on parenting and Black masculinities in South Africa by allowing Black fathers to rewrite their narratives and contribute meaningfully to the fatherhood discourse. These findings reflect participants' attempts to move away from traditional and patriarchal ideologies about masculinity and fatherhood that only position men as financial providers. By embracing their ability to be caregivers, participants embraced more hybrid forms of masculinity, which allowed them to integrate both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities [53, 86].

However, the study also demonstrated that both a father figure and a mother figure are crucial to a child's optimal development. In as much as children growing up with maternal figures may benefit from the presence of paternal figures in their lives, children raised by single fathers also stand to benefit from having mother figures in their lives. This view was further supported by participants through suggestions to other single fathers, such as avoiding divorce as much as possible and building a solid and stable home environment for children. Findings further pointed to the idea that children are not raised in isolation but may benefit from the help of various family and community members [7]. Moreover, the results of our study further highlighted the caregiver role that mothers and grandmothers still play in their children's and grandchildren's lives. A closer analysis of these results reveals

that participants may still be committed to patriarchal discourses of parenthood that consider heterosexual relationships as the "ideal" type of relationship for raising children [45]. For example, this was reflected in most fathers' attempts to solicit support from mother figures, especially when raising adolescent girls and faced with their daughters' menstruation. Participants spoke of the involvement of female partners and did not consider alternative family structures and dynamics outside of heteronormative relationships. These results support findings from other studies establishing that, despite progressive gender and family policies and legislation adopted by the South African government, traditional and patriarchal ideologies about gender roles are still prevalent in South Africa [19, 101]. Therefore, participants' experiences reflected both an attempt to challenge dominant narratives about being a parent and an enactment of traditional masculine beliefs and ideologies of "gender" [51, 102].

Moreover, participants referred to the influence of historical, social, economic, and cultural factors in how they assumed their role as Black single fathers. Considering such factors allowed us to appreciate the complexities, difficulties, conflicts, and tensions embedded in participants' experiences of having to negotiate gender roles in contemporary South Africa, especially for a generation of individuals raised in a patriarchal society in which gender roles are expected to be performed according to traditional norms. Despite the fact that participants identified as Black, they did not specifically refer to the role of race in shaping their experiences as fathers. However, the role that race has played in shaping the realities of many South Africans was considered [86]. Participants' narratives included experiences shaped by how they understood their identities as Black men in South Africa. For example, participants attempted in their stories to distance themselves from negative stereotypes about being a Black man and a Black father in South Africa by rejecting the discourse that Black fathers are absent and uninvolved in their children's lives. By doing this, they were also engaged in a protest against hegemonic and negative stereotypes about South African men.

The intrapersonal conflicts participants reported in their experiences may be understood, through the lens of Bamberg's theory, as influenced by the tension between previously held beliefs about manhood and fatherhood and their current and at times, contradictory realities [75, 77]. There was tension and discomfort among participants, particularly when assuming roles traditionally attributed to mothers. This further highlighted participants' fear of transgressing hegemonic notions of being a man and a father and the interrelationship between personal and broader narratives around fatherhood and thereby, between processes of personal and social change [47, 53]. In addition, participants' experiences also showed how they navigated among the intersectionality of gender, race, and social class. While they benefited from the privileges of being men in a patriarchal society, they also grappled with challenges related to being Black and being a marginalised group of single Black fathers.

The process of constructing a coherent narrative around participants' experiences as single fathers also reflected moments of tension, contradiction, and inconsistency in the

process of navigating and refining various aspects of their selfhood or identity [75]. Participants found that prioritising the needs of their children over marital conflicts was important for building relationships with the children. Other participants suggested prioritising building a solid relationship with children and healing from the loss of a loved one or from divorce before entering a new relationship. Overall, participants' experiences as single fathers were characterised by intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions that revolved around choosing between their needs and those of their children.

There are a number of implications to this study's findings. Firstly, in light of the results presented above, there is a need to engage all men in the process of gender resocialisation that focuses on renegotiating gender roles. In addition, the results of our study have highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for fathers to be more involved in raising their children by engaging in tasks beyond their traditional role as providers. This is crucial as it will initiate the process of breaking down gender-role stereotypes and create equal relationship dynamics within families. The changes suggested above can and should be implemented both at an individual as well as a broader societal level. This study has inspired new optimism about fathers' involvement in their children's lives beyond traditional norms of masculinity. In addition, the study has meaningfully contributed to the project of social justice by giving a voice to a marginalised community and by challenging limiting and problematic notions about fatherhood and parenthood in South Africa.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

P1	=	Participant One
P2	=	Participant Two
P3	=	Participant Three
P4	=	Participant Four
P5	=	Participant Five
P6	=	Participant Six
P7	=	Participant Seven

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Ethical clearance was obtained from the School of Human and Community Development Ethics Committee (HREC Non-medical) and the Registrar of the Faculty of Humanity at the University of Witwatersrand.

HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

No animals were used in this study. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of institutional and/or research committee and with the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki, as revised in 2013.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

All the data and supportive information are provided within the article.

STANDARDS OF REPORTING

COREQ guidelines were followed.

FUNDING

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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Appendix A: Demographic information

1. Information about Participants

-	Age	Level of Education	Employment and Profession	Reason for Becoming a Single Father	Duration of Parenting as Single Fathers	Current Relationship Status	Relationship with Ex-wife (for Divorced Participants)
P1	51 years old	-	-	Wife's death	7 years (from when a child was in grade 7)	In a relationship with a girlfriend	-
P2	40 years old	Diploma	Process Controller	Divorce (breakup)	Less than a year	Single	Distant and conflictual relationship
P3	54 years old	Diploma	Mechanical Engineer	Divorce	23 years	In a relationship with a girlfriend	Amicable relationship
P4	57 years old	Diploma	Self-employed (Construction)	Wife's death	16 years	In a relationship with a girlfriend	-
P5	54 years old	-	Unemployed	Divorce	8 years	In a relationship with a girlfriend	Amicable relationship
P6	49 years old	Grade 11	Optical Technician	Divorce	+/- 5 years	In a relationship with a girlfriend	Distant relationship
P7	40 years old	Diploma	Small Business owner (Personal Trainer)	Wife's death	3 years	In a relationship (married)	-

2. Information about Participants' Children

	Number of Children	Age of Oldest Child when Participant Became Single Fathers	Children's Gender
P1	One	13 years old	Female
P2	One	5 years old	Female
P3	Two	5 years old	Males (2)
P4	Five	21 years old	Males (3), and Females (2)
P5	Two	12 years old	Male (1) and Female (1)
P6	Three	14 years old	Females (3)
P7	Three	17 years old	Male (1), and Females (2)

Appendix B

Primary Question:

What has your experience as a single father been, raising a child or children on your own?

Secondary Questions

1. Please tell me about your child or children (*i.e.*, age, gender, how long you have been

raising him/her or them, how many children you have, *etc*.).

2. How did you become a single father?

3. How has your experience of being a single father been like? (*i.e.*, opportunities and challenges).

4. How has your experience as a single father shaped your identity as a male?

5. How has your experience been raising a boy/boys or a girl/girls or both? (Please choose the option(s) applicable to you).

6. How has your experience been raising a younger child/younger children or an older

child/older children, or both? (Please choose the option(s) applicable to you).

7. What support do you draw from as a single father?

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