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## Gay Fathers Study

At the start of the twenty-first century, individuals are deciding to live their lives and raise their children in families that 50 years ago would not have been deemed as families (Lubbe, 2007). Societal factors such as adoption, divorce, migrant fathers, and HIV/AIDS have all contributed a part in influencing the manners in which non-traditional family forms have developed (Lubbe, 2007). Developments and changes in globalized culture force psychologists to take cognizance of the various ways in which families are created, formed, and in which children are reared (Lubbe, 2007). For many years, members of the gay community have been associated with a lifestyle devoid of children, however, gay individuals have been increasingly choosing motherhood and fatherhood by creating families of their own, or by choosing to live with children from a previous heterosexual relationship (Dunne, 2000; Lubbe, 2007).

According to Labuzan-Lopez (2015), parenting can be described as the activities that involve rearing a child, such as the techniques, skills, and methods that you use to raise a child, whereas parenthood is the state of being a parent. Thus, fatherhood, we can define as the state of being a father (Collins, 2014). It has often been put forward that gay men become fathers through the process of marrying a woman, having children, and only later come out as gay, often suggested in the context of divorce (Patterson & Tornello, 2010). Other gay men come out at much younger ages, however, and become fathers in the context of pre-existing gay identities (Patterson & Tornello, 2010).

In today's generation, many men who are 'new fathers' provide more hands-on care for their children than their own fathers, however, these men are deemed to be unusual, and they challenge the traditional notions about fatherhood (Morrison & Lynch, 2016). To a large extent, men's full involvement in childcare is hampered by the myth of natural motherhood (Morrison & Lynch, 2016). According to Morrison and Lynch (2016), the myth states that because women give birth to children, it makes them naturally able to care for children. This myth may present a trial for gay men because there is no female parent in the family, which in turn may cause difficulties for gay men who wish to be parents (Morrison & Lynch, 2016).

### Problem Statement

In most societies, heteronormativity is evident, which is also the case in South Africa, which consists of a predominantly traditional and family-orientated society with a culture in which the traditional family is powerful, visual and valued (Lubbe, 2007). According to Pennington and Knight (2011) heteronormativity refers to the naïve assumption that heterosexuality is the golden standard of sexual orientations and that legal and social constructions should consequently be designed and maintained to support it. The traditional nuclear family, that is considered to consist of a legally married, male and female (heterosexual) couple has been regarded as the standard against which all other kinds of couple or family arrangements have been assessed and judged (Ziehl, 2001).

The concepts of parenthood and heterosexuality are so entirely interrelated in the cultural minds of most English-speaking countries that the measly idea of gay fatherhood can seem strange (Patterson & Tornello, 2010). Even-though changes in social attitudes and the elimination of

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discriminatory laws, the problem of gay couples wanting to parent remains controversial at both legal and attitudinal levels, which thwarts the task of parenting for these individuals (Pennington & Knight, 2011; McCann & Delmonte, 2005; Baker, 2002).

Research on same-sex families and parenting remains very limited in South Africa. Much of the literature from the late 1980s to the early 1990s recorded the fact that homosexuality was believed to be deviant and constituted criminal behavior, and same-sex parents were considered to have a negative and corrupting impact on children's development (Lubbe, 2007). Additionally, few studies have investigated the lived experiences of gay male fathers and how they feel they broadly handle the shift parent or fatherhood as they try to find equilibrium between traditional masculine and feminine parental characteristics (Baker, 2017).

## **Rationale**

Considering social and technological developments, more gay men are becoming fathers, as a result, there is an increasing need to analyze psychological concomitants in the growing phenomenon of gay fatherhood within modern streams of family life (Shenkman, Ifrah & Shmotkin, 2017).

It is the notion that psychologists should be able to work with various individuals from different perspectives and backgrounds, even when such perspectives and backgrounds are experientially, spiritually and morally dissimilar from their own (Lubbe, 2007). Psychologists need to be cognizant of the manners in which individuals construct their families, and how they might partake and give implicit consent to negative social dialogues that are harmful to the well-being of their clients or patients (Lubbe, 2007). The initial 'State of South Africa's Fathers' reports present important patterns that occur in knowledge creation in South Africa and recommends the need to undertake more research with nationally representative samples to comprehend the 'state' of fathers in South Africa better (Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018).

Not a lot is known about the ways in which same-sex couples or same-sex families function and operate in a primarily heteronormative society and, there is very limited South African research available, and practitioners and researchers must solely rely on international research (Lubbe, 2007). The Application of the concept 'father' needs to be investigated further to afford research findings, policies and interventions that are not only internationally comparable but also locally applicable and contextually valid (Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018). There is a lack of a general understanding of fathers and fatherhood and this contributes to the lack of research and information on men who are fathers (Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018). The limited research available has shown that gay and bisexual men contemplating parenthood grapple with several internal and external barriers, including socialized gendered parenting roles, internalized heterosexism, and reconsidering masculine identities (Tsfati & Ben-Ari, 2019).

## **Literature Review**

According to The Human Science and Research Council (2016) who conducted a survey in South Africa, there is over half a million adult men and women, across all races, living in both urban and rural areas, and across all age groups who identified themselves as homosexual, bisexual, or gender non-conforming, which is consistent with similar population ratios in many different countries. Furthermore, one in four people (27 percent) in South Africa report having a

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family member or friend who is homosexual and more than half the population that they sampled said that they would 'accept' a homosexual family member or friend (HSRC, 2016).

It is argued that gay men might experience the urge to either become fathers or play a more complex part in the lives of their children (Rothmann, 2011). These children may have been produced from either previous heterosexual relationships or newly adopted by gay men after 'coming out' (Rothmann, 2010). Unfortunately, this link between homosexuality and parenting has never been encountered with a significant deal of interest (Stanton & Maier, 2005). By deciding to become primary parents to children, gay men challenge traditional definitions of masculinity and especially paternity and prevailing gender and sexual norms of gay culture itself (Stacey, 2006). Furthermore, gay men chase their fatherly journey despite immense obstacles, without access to customary biological, institutional, cultural or legal means (Stacey, 2006). Taking into consideration the unique social and relational context in which gay men consider and pursue parenthood, of great importance is how gay men construct their parenting motivations and desires (Goldberg, Downing & Moyer, 2012). Researchers are increasingly acknowledging that the path to parenthood cannot be fully comprehended without considering the timing of parenthood, which may be affected by personal, relational, and economic considerations (Goldberg, Downing & Moyer, 2012).

The traditional view of regarding parenthood is rooted in gender attributes that distinguish motherhood and fatherhood from each other, constructing them as gender-differentiated practices (Tsfati & Ben-Ari, 2019). These perspectives regarded motherhood as the most essential element of a woman's identity but ascribed a marginal role to fatherhood with regards to caring for babies and children (Tsfati & Ben-Ari, 2019). These notions contributed to scholars claiming that traditional parenthood characteristics mirrored the gendered stratified marketplace, in which women are viewed as primary caregivers and men's only expectation was to provide for their families (Lambert, 2008; Tsfati & Ben-Ari, 2019). According to Schafer, Auerbach, and Silverstein (2005), gay parenthood is regarded as one dimension of broader changes in the public sphere, taking on traditional concepts of family, gender and family (Tsfati & Ben-Ari, 2019).

For gay individuals, the timing of coming out may affect the timing of parenthood (Gagnon, Riley, Toole & Goldberg, 2007). In the end, certain events and experiences may drive men toward realizing their parental aspirations and pursuing parenthood (Goldberg, Downing, & Moyer, 2012). Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) found in their qualitative study that men frequently described key turning points as activating their parental desires (Goldberg, Downing & Moyer, 2012). These key turning points included having experiences with children, encountering other gay men who chose to parent, and engaging with lesbian mothers (Goldberg, Downing & Moyer, 2012). Research on gay parenthood has confirmed how these men negotiate with gender characteristics of parenthood, expanding concepts of parenthood in a manner that destabilizes gender dichotomy (Berkowitz, 2011; Tsfati & Ben-Ari, 2019).

Regardless, same-sex marriage legislation and adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples in South Africa underline the shifting nature of traditional ideologies of marriage and family life, thus dictating the importance of an intricate study of the nature of gay parenting as a new familial form (Rothmann, 2011). This idea is strengthened by Cohen & Savin-Williams (1996) who state that there hasn't been another time in history when homosexuals have been the recipients of such excessive attention and inquiry (Rothmann, 2011).

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## Methodology

The aim of the proposed study is to explore gay South African fathers' narratives on fatherhood. The study will explore how gay fathers define and perceive what fatherhood is.

## Research Design

The proposed study will make use of qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured interviews, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis to explore gay men's narratives on fatherhood through relational talk. According to Dudovskiy (2019), interviews can be described as a qualitative research technique that involves performing intensive individual interviews with a small number of participants to explore their views on a certain idea, situation or program. Thus, in semi-structured interviews, "the interviewer prepares a set of same questions to be answered by all interviewees.", (Dudovskiy, 2019). Moreover, extra questions may be asked during the interviews to shed light on/ or further expand specific issues (Dudovskiy, 2019). Interviews are also a useful tool for accessing knowledge about the lived experiences of people pertaining to a phenomenon (Baker, 2017). A qualitative inquiry can also provide researchers with more colorful, descriptive answers in collected data and interviews grant researchers access to respondents' perspectives, reflections, and insights on substantial relational experiences (Babbie, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

According to Shaw and Bailey (2009), discourse analysis is the investigation of social life, understood through the analysis of language in its broadest sense. It provides means of investigating meaning, whether in culture or in conversation (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). Discourse analysis seeks to comprehend the interactions in society, by trying to pinpoint and analyze the rules employed by individuals, the connection between the linguistic regularities, on the one side, meanings and finality, on the other, that are negotiated through the discourse (Suciu, 2019). Discourse guides ways of conversing about a topic, defining appropriate ways to talk, write or conduct oneself and this can aid a range of social functions (Shaw & Bailey, 2009). However, a general concern about discourse analysis is that research findings represent nothing more than researchers' opinions (Shaw & Bailey, 2009).

Narrative analysis is a strategy that recognizes the degree to which the stories one tells provide insights about one's lived experiences (Thorne, 2000). It is through these analytic processes that aid the detection of the main narrative themes within the accounts people provide about their lives; that we uncover how they understand and make sense of their lives (Thorne, 2000).

## Participants

The study is open to South African fathers who identify as 'gay'; who are single, coupled or married; who achieved fatherhood through any available means such as adoption surrogacy, previous relationships and/or foster care. \*Gay South African fathers who currently reside in Gauteng and/or the Western Cape will constitute the sampling frame\*

## Sampling Method

The study will make use of nonprobability sampling, specifically purposive sampling and

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snowball sampling. Nonprobability sampling refers to sampling techniques for which an individual's probability of being selected for inclusion in the sample is unknown (DeCarlo, 2020). Purposeful sampling is a technique generally used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases of the most effective use of constrained resources (Palinkas, et al., 2015). It entails identifying and selecting people or groups of individuals that are specifically knowledgeable about; or experienced a phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, et al., 2015). One must be conscious of the various challenges in identifying and applying a suitable purposeful sampling strategy in a study (Palinkas, et al., 2015).

Snowball sampling is defined as a nonprobability sampling technique in which the participants have characteristics that are hard to find (Bhat, 2020). It essentially entails existing participants providing referrals to recruit participants for a research study (Bhat, 2020). Snowball sampling creates the ability to recruit hidden populations, the possibility to collect primary data in a cost-effective way, it can be completed in a short duration of time, and very little planning is needed to start the primary data collection process (Research Methodology, 2019). However, one has to be aware that oversampling a particular network of peers can result in bias, participants may be hesitant to provide names of peers and may raise ethical concerns, and there is no guarantee about the representativeness of samples (Research Methodology, 2019).

## **Data Collection**

The proposed study will make initial recruitment through local same-sex parent Facebook support groups and with the assistance of local LGBTQ organizations. Contact will be made with the Facebook groups' founders and the organizations' managers to ask for permission to post the proposed study's request for participants to their respective social media websites (see Appendix A). They will also be kindly requested that an e-mail request be forwarded to lists of member e-mail addresses (see Appendix B). Any contacts made through initial recruitment will be asked to participate in snowball sampling. In other words, those who have already participated in the interview will be asked to reach out to others in their own personal or social network who matches the selection requirements.

The study will make use of semi-structured interviews, which will include a set of questions to which the participants will respond (see Appendix C and Appendix D). The interview will include three sections: the first section will pose questions pertaining to biographical information; such as age, ethnicity, level of education, how long have you been in a relationship or married. The second section will include questions about being a father and lastly, the third section will include questions about experiences as a family in general.

## **Ethics**

Ethics clearance will be requested from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical). Participation will be voluntary, and the process will be explained in writing to all potential participants in a written information sheet (see Appendix E). Participants also have recourse to contact me or my supervisor for further explanation or clarification of the study, as well as registering complaints. Participants will grant informed written consent to show that they comprehend the process, as well as agree to participate freely in the interview (see Appendix C and Appendix D). Confidentiality will always be maintained, and participants are free to withdraw from the survey at any time or choose to withdraw their answers at any time without fear of any

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negative consequence or loss of benefits. All Individuals participating in this research study will remain anonymous as their personal information is not required for the purpose of this study.