SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES: FROM STEREOTYPE TO ARCHETYPE

by

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I declare that

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES: FROM STEREOTYPE TO ARCHETYPE

is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature: _____

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Date: _____

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SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES: FROM STEREOTYPE TO ARCHETYPE

SUMMARY

The number of single-parent families has increased dramatically in the world. In South Africa, this increase has partly been due to the increased number of deaths as a result of the AIDS pandemic. The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of widowers as single parents. The study proposes to elevate the view of single-parent families, which classes them as stereotypes of victimization, to where such families come to represent responsible archetypes. Unstructured in-depth interviews were used to obtain data from two Black and two White widowed single fathers. Thematic content analysis was utilized to identify emerging themes from the fathers' stories. Fathers in this study challenged the deficit model's view of single parenting which claims that these families are broken. As far as its applicability is concerned, this study may be beneficial to psychotherapists, single parents and society as a whole.

Keywords: Single-parent family, widower, stereotype, archetype.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Families are the social units which are held primarily responsible for the procreation, nurturance, and socialisation of children. Because families serve these vital social functions, the family as a microcosm of society has been the focus of a great deal of attention (Mendes, 1975). Partaking of social stereotypes around single-parent families, studies of these families have been based on the pathological (deficit) model of single parent-families which claims that such families are broken, deviant, and dysfunctional (Javo, Ronning, Heyerdahl & Rudmin, 2004; Snyman, 1993). This author hopes to de-stigmatize single parents in general, and single fathers in particular. It is also hoped that this study will help professionals working with single men who are trying to raise children on their own and be the best parents for their children.

There has been a shift from the traditional two-parent family to more diverse forms of family structures (Dowd, 1997); therefore, an understanding of single- parent

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families is essential. Although an increasing number of
people are choosing to raise children on their own, parents
may become single parents through death or divorce. Parents
who find themselves parenting their children on their own
after the death of a spouse are faced with the numerous
challenges of lone parenting at a time when they are going
through their own trauma.

Statement of the problem

The present study is an exploratory one, aimed at
achieving a preliminary understanding of single parent-
families. The focus is on how the family functions as a
unit in the absence of one parent, namely the mother. The
unit of analysis is the widowed father, who has a child or
children under 18 at the time of the interview.

Design of the study

In order to gather in-depth information and
descriptions regarding the experiences of widowed fathers
as single parents, a method that allowed more probing and
flexibility was chosen. Qualitative research methodology
using thematic content analysis was used to explore the

experiences of widowed single fathers. This approach allows for the fathers to tell their stories, and in the process, to co-construct their realities with the researcher. The themes that will emerge from this study will hopefully provide participants with an enriched understanding of the process they find themselves going through.

Sampling

Sampling will be purposive. The sample will consist of 2 Black widowers and 2 White widowers who have children below the age of 18 years, who stay with the fathers, full-time.

Data Collection

Unstructured interviews will be used to gather information from the participants.

Data Analysis

The interviews will be audio-taped and then transcribed. Thematic content analysis will be undertaken. The transcribed interview summaries will be sent to the

participants to ensure the accuracy of interpretation reflected in interviews.

Definition of concepts

There are several concepts which provide a lens through which this study is viewed. The concepts which will be defined include: Single-parent families, widowers, stereotype, and archetype.

Single-parent families

According to (www.answers.com), single-parent families are families with children under the age of 18, headed by a parent who is widowed or divorced and has not remarried, or by a parent who has never married. Single parent families are a common variant of nuclear families. In this study, 'single' will be used interchangeably with 'lone' and 'sole', which means alone.

Widowers

The South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary (1993) defines a widower as a man who has lost his wife by death and who has not married again.

Stereotype

According to (en.wikipedia.org), stereotypes are ideas held by some individuals about members of particular groups, based solely on membership of that group. They are often used in a negative or prejudicial sense and are frequently used to justify certain discriminatory behaviours. A stereotype is often a negative caricature or inversion of some positive characteristic possessed by members of a group, exaggerated to the point where it becomes repulsive or ridiculous. Stereotype production is based on:

- Generalization
- Exaggerations or distortions
- Presentation of cultural attributes as being natural.
- Simplification

(www.media-awareness.ca) asserts that stereotypes, exaggerations or distortions are as old as human culture itself. Stereotypes reflect ideas which groups of people hold about others who are different from them. Stereotypes ignore the uniqueness of individuals by painting all members of a group with the same brush.

Archetype

The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2000) defines an archetype as the most typical or perfect example of a particular type of person or thing. (www.answers.com) defines an archetype as an idealized model of a person, object, or concept from which similar instances are derived, copied, or emulated. The term was adopted by literary critics from the writings of psychologist Carl Jung, who formulated a theory of the collective unconscious (www.britannica.com). Jungian archetype is a thought pattern that finds worldwide parallels, either in cultures or in individuals.

Chapter Outline

This study consists of a theoretical component which includes a theoretical frame of reference and a literature review. The practical component includes the methodology section, the interviews, and the analysis and conclusion.

The review of related literature in this study provides a backdrop against which single parents in general and widowers in particular are perceived. An exploration of the existing knowledge on single parents, the role of fathers in parenting, widowers as single parents, and the challenges facing single parents is undertaken. This dissertation on single parenting from a non deficit model perspective is a pioneering study in a field where there has been little documented research in this country.

The purpose of the practical component is to provide four widowed fathers with an opportunity to tell their stories and relate their experiences as single parents. Themes emerging from these stories will be explored and discussed.

The following chapters are included:

Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the study with definition of main concepts. The statement of the problem and the research design are described, and an outline of the chapters is provided. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical frame of reference that informed the study, namely Social Constructionism.

Chapter 3 examines related literature. This will be followed by an examination of single parents from an ecological perspective. The view of normality from a second-order cybernetics perspective will also be discussed.

Chapter 4 consists of a comprehensive explanation of the research methodology used in this study, namely the qualitative approach. Thematic data analysis methods are discussed.

Chapter 5 contains the researcher's narrative of each widower's story. Emerging themes are then discussed. The

common themes found in all four of the participants'
narratives are also evaluated.

Chapter 6 offers a conclusion and analyzes the
implications of the research findings. Thereafter, the
researcher's reflections concerning the research process
will be provided.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

It is an unfortunate misunderstanding (a legacy of
rationalism) to think that truth can only be the truth
that is composed of universal moments; that the truth
of a situation is precisely that which is repeatable
and constant in it.(Bakhtin, in Shotter and
Billig, 1998, p. 13).

Introduction

This chapter aims to explain the epistemological and
theoretical positions that have influenced the
conceptualization of this study. The views held by the
deficit models of single parenting claim that single-parent
families are deviant, and these models draw sharp
differences between functional two-parent families and
'deviant' single parent families.

The origins of Social Constructionism are diverse and
fragmented, as one would expect from an evolving *zeitgeist*
(Wick, 1996). It is a development of an earlier branch of

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sociology, instigated by Marx and Mannheim, called the sociology of knowledge (Owen, 1992). Marx once wrote that "Social existence determines man's consciousness" and this phrase formed the basis of Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 17).

There is no single definition of the concept and no one feature that could be said to identify it. One should rather view it as a mode of thinking. Burr (1995) states that different constructionist theorists may share some characteristics with each other, but that there is really nothing that they all have in common.

Social Constructionism encompasses various positions which all share a common epistemological scepticism about the nature of 'facts'. It is defined as an approach to psychology and other bodies of knowledge that focuses on meaning and power, and its aim is to account for ways in which phenomena are socially constructed (Michael, 2006). The following are some of the basic tenets of Social Constructionism:

Anti-realism

Social Constructionism views discourse about the
world, not as a reflection or map of the world but as an
artifact of communal exchange (Gergen, 1985, p. 266).
Social Constructionism insists that we take a critical
stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding
the world (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Burr, 1995; Gergen,
1985).

The everyday, taken-for-granted world is one that
originates in the thoughts and actions of society and is
maintained as real by the inhabitants of that society
(Berger & Luckman, 1966). Social Constructionism invites us
to be critical and to challenge the view that conventional
knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of
the world (Gergen, 1985).

Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted
by man and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent
whole (Berger & Luckman, 1966). According to Burr (1995),
knowledge is sustained by social processes, and knowledge
of the world is not derived from the nature of the world

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but is constructed between people. Burr (1995, p. 4)
states:

> It is through the daily interactions between people
> in the course of social life that our versions of
> knowledge becomes fabricated. Therefore, social
> interaction of all kinds, and particularly language,
> is of great interest to social constructionists.

A social constructionist perspective provides us with
the means of confronting claims to knowledge with the
question: 'Could it be otherwise?' (Shotter, 1993, p. 35).
Bhaskar in Shotter (1993, p. 35) points out the following
with regard to his own transcendental realism:

> It entails the acceptance of (1) the principle of
> *epistemic relativity*, which states that all beliefs
> are socially produced, so that all knowledge is
> transient, and neither truth-values nor criteria of
> rationality exists outside historical time. But it
> entails the rejection of (2) the doctrine of
> *judgmental* (or moral) *relativity*, which maintains that
> all beliefs are equally valid, in the sense that there
> can be no rational grounds for preferring one to

another.

Shotter (1993) explains further by saying that although the postmodern *self* may be something of a mosaic, no self is completely an island. One occupies a multiplicity of standpoints, each within at least a local community, and within such communities there are standards, ways of judging, to which one must conform if one is to be counted as a member. However, this does not mean that it is only the standards within one's own 'clan' which count. Along with one's own ways of judging, one can ask: 'Could they be otherwise?'; 'what other ways of judging might be possible?' (Shotter, 1993, p. 35).

Burr (1995) states that what we regard as 'truth' is not the product of an objective observation of the world, but rather of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other. Berger and Luckman (1966, p. 17) capture the notion of reality in this observation: "Pascal's famous statement is that what is truth on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other". Gergen (1985, p. 268) says that:

The degree to which a given form of understanding

prevails or is sustained across time is not

fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity

of the perspective in question, but on the

vicissitudes of Social processes.

Knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 1995).

These negotiated understandings could take a wide variety

of different forms; therefore, we talk of numerous possible

social constructions of the world, with each construction

bringing with it a different kind of action from human

beings (Burr, 1995, p. 5). Descriptions or constructions of

the world sustain some patterns of social action and

exclude others (Burr, 1995).

Goodman in Phipps (2004), supports Anderson and

Goolishian's (1992) notion that the conceptualization of

reality as a multiverse of meanings created in dynamic

social exchange and conversation moves us away from

concerns about issues of unique truths and into a

multiverse that includes a diversity of conflicting

versions of the world (p.321). Within this framework, there

are no '*real' external entities,* only communicating and

languaging individuals. Therefore there are no 'facts' to

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be known, systems to be 'understood', and no patterns and regularities to be 'discovered' (Phipps, 2004, p. 322). Truly objective knowledge is, and always has been, a figment of our imagination and terms like reality and objectivity should be put in quotation marks (Maturana in Efran et al, 1990).

Language

Language is considered to be the medium through which real knowledge can be accessed (Walters, 1998). According to Shotter and Billig (1998, p. 13), language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable (p.13). Berger and Luckman (1966) argue that language provides us with ready-made possibilities for the ongoing objectification of our unfolding experience. They assert that:

> Language is pliantly expansive so as to allow me to
> objectify a great variety of experiences coming my
> way in the course of my life. Language also typifies
> experiences, for the typified experience can, in
> principle, be duplicated by anyone falling into the

category in question (Berger & Luckman, 1996, p. 53).

Maturana in Phipps (2004, p. 323) says that "language is for humans what grooming is for chimps". It creates and maintains social order. Efran, Lukens and Lukens (1990, p. 32) claim that "it is in language that meanings are created". To apprehend the world as a unified whole, we first have to use language to divide it into a series of separate, definable objects and events. The objectivist believes that our conceptual distinctions yield increasingly accurate and sophisticated understanding of the outside world as it actually exists (Efran, Lukens & Lukens, 1990).

Burr (1995) maintains that concepts are arbitrary divisions and categorizations of our experience. We have divided our world into things. Maturana in Efran et al (1990) reminds us that even our most elegant 'maps' of the universe are constrained by our biology, and that we see the world only in terms of ourselves. What we think we know about the world is always determined by the exigencies of our own situation (Efran et al, 1990, p. 32). Language is seen as a self-referential system (Derrida in Burr, 1995). Wittgenstein in Shotter (1993, p. 78) asks:

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So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false? … It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use.

Shotter (1993, p. 40) adds that words only become one's own when others addressed by one's utterances are prepared to listen to them, and to hear in them one's own accent or tone, one's own semantic and expressive intentions, the 'shaping' one gives to words that is expressive of one's own being. Shotter (1993) further contends that language as a 'tool' extends our capacities to act, to 'move' others, and ourselves, while the 'prosthetic' function of language extends our perceptual skills at being a certain kind of listener, speaker, disinterested observer, or storyteller (p. 117).

Culture

Those who grow up within the fortunate space of a still vital culture experience themselves as living 'within' a world that contains certain kinds of entities and events, to which they respond with certain evaluative orientations— with surprise, disgust, acceptance,

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affirmations, resentment, resignation, joy, delight, and so forth (Shotter, 1993, p. 147).

Mayerfeld Bell (1998) describes culture as the conversations we have and which we expect to have with various people in various places and at various times. Culture also reflects the conversations we have which we did not expect to have with these various people in these various places at these various times.

The ways in which we understand the world are culturally specific, which means that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative (Burr, 1995). For example, in the traditional African culture, a man's worth is measured by the number of children he has, and not the type of car he drives or the size of the house in which he lives. Burr (1995) elaborates further by saying that the particular forms of knowledge that abound in any culture are artifacts of it, and we should not assume that our ways of understanding are better (in terms of being any nearer the truth) than other ways (p. 4).

Lutz (1990) claims that everyday understanding is a cultural and social process involving negotiation, interpersonal evaluation and power struggles. In other words, the everyday understanding of, say for instance, single fatherhood, does not simply occur as a form of reflection on experiences of single fathers, but emerges as people justify and negotiate both cultural values and privileges of power that some members of this society hold (Lutz, 1990).

In a conversation, we do not just say anything about anything. We negotiate, we discuss, we mistake, we mislead, and we otherwise stumble into a jointly creative response to the conditions of our understanding and misunderstanding (Bell 1998, p. 53). Geertz in Brandstadter (1990, p. 85) says: "We are incomplete or unfinished animals, who complete or finish ourselves through culture".

Social Constructionism is the claim and viewpoint that the content of our consciousness, and our mode of relating to others, is taught by our culture and society and that all the metaphysical quantities we take for granted are learned from others around us (Owen, 1992, p. 386).

Dickerson and Zimmerman (1996) draw attention to the fact that the constructionist viewpoint considers the development of certain cultural narrative or 'discourses' that are formed by, and in turn influence, people and take on normative views against which people measure themselves. According to Gergen (1985), from the constructionist position, the process of understanding is not automatically driven by forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationships. Each case of construction of persons or relationships has undergone significant change across time.

How the society views single fatherhood now depends on the dominant narrative of the time, and changes in the concept of single fatherhood do not reflect an alteration in the concept itself, but one which is lodged in culturally and historically dependent factors.

Power

Many of the 'powerful particulars' of social life, like people's beliefs, their identities and even their minds, are socially constructed and have a continuously negotiated and reproduced existence in certain of our

social activities (Shotter, 1993). Power is an idea, a
construction. People create the idea of power and then
behave as if power simply existed in an unmediated way.
However, it is created by the context and is invented by
the protagonist of the situation (Bateson cited in Cecchin,
1992, p. 89).

 Foucault's more general understanding of power as
dynamic begins with his rejection of any reification of
power. He insists that "power is not something that is
acquired, seized, or shared; something that one holds on to
or allows to slip away" (Rouse, 1994, p. 105). In line with
a social constructionist view, Foucault raises questions
about power and writes about the epistemic context within
which bodies of knowledge become intelligible and
authoritative. Foucault argues that particular
investigations were structured terms of which concepts and
statements were intelligible together and how these
statements were organized thematically, as well as which of
these statements counted as 'serious', who was empowered to
speak seriously and what questions and procedures were
relevant in order to assess the credibility of those
statements that were taken seriously (Rouse, 1994, p. 93).

Andersen (1992) maintains that a social
constructionist stance shows an awareness of power
relations hidden within the assumptions of any social
discourse. Dickerson and Zimmerman (1996) assert that from
a social constructionist point of view, problems such as
abuse and violence are actions taken by someone who is
afforded a position of power by the dominant culture
against a person with less power. Burkit (1998) maintains
that power is not so much expressed by agents in the
acceptance of an orthodox view which needs to be turned
upside down, but is rather the pre-discursive *doxa* of
accepted ways of interacting that forms the everyday
habitus (p. 177). The problem is not one of challenging the
consciously accepted ideology with a radical discourse;
there must also be a corresponding objective social crisis
that calls into question many of the accepted and implicit
modes of institutionalized activities (Burkit, 1998).

According to Doan (1997), Social Constructionism is
interested in the narratives or discourses that have taken
on a normative standard against which people measure and
judge themselves; it deconstructs the Grand Narratives by
focusing on how the prevailing norms have evolved over

time, especially those that marginalize and subjugate people (p. 129).

Burr (1995) provided an account of Foucault's view of power as not being the same as some form of possession that some people have and others do not, but as an effect of discourse. Foucault views knowledge as power over others, the power to define others. Foucault further elaborates that to define the world or a person in a way that allows you to do the things you want is to exercise power (Burr, 1995). Foucault in Burr (1995, p. 64) argues that:

To construe the world in terms of those people who are 'mad' and those who are 'sane' (thereby producing one particular 'knowledge') brings with it a power inequality between those groups.

Hacking (1999) argues that the primary use of Social Constructionism is to raise consciousness. Gergen in Burr (1995) sees people as being motivated by a desire for speaking rights or voice and to have their interpretation of events accepted as the truthful one.

The challenge for social constructionists is to
transcend the traditional subject-object dualism and all
its attendant problems and to develop a new framework of
analysis based on an alternative theory of the functioning
potentials of science (Gergen, 1985).

Locating Social Constructionism within
psychotherapy

In the mid-eighties, a small group of family
therapists (the Tromso group, the Galveston group, Lynn
Hoffman, Peggy Penn, and others) found themselves
dissatisfied with the 'objective and absolute' nature of
traditional approaches to family therapy and began
experimenting with alternative approaches (Andersen, 1992;
Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Hoffman, 1992; Wick, 1996).
According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992), the social
constructionist therapist adopts the not-knowing position
that entails a general attitude in which the therapist's
actions communicate an abundant, genuine curiosity. The
therapist's role, expertise, and emphasis is to develop a
free conversational space and to facilitate an emerging
dialogical process. The emphasis is not to produce change,
but to open space for conversation (Anderson & Goolishian,

1992). Cecchin (1992) notes that what therapists 'discovered' in therapy depended on the 'discoverer' and on the type of questions that were asked. The challenge for a therapist is to demolish the old story and move towards a co-authored new story that opens up new possibilities for clients.

According to Cecchin (1992), the shift towards Social Constructionism emanated from the continuous move from an epistemology based on cybernetic principles. Becvar and Becvar (2003) asserted that the modernist stance assesses and attempts to change behaviour relative to the normative standards and criteria accepted within the larger societal context. From such a perspective (Becvar & Becvar, 2003), one defines problems as existing 'out there' in a real, knowable reality.

The social constructionist therapist suggests that reality is constructed as a function of the belief systems that one brings to a particular situation and according to which one operates. Becvar and Becvar (2003) state that, rather than discovering behaviour, we create it. As therapists, the way we use language, or choose words to describe something becomes crucial. Problems are stories

people have agreed to tell themselves; therefore, constructionist therapists have to persuade clients to tell themselves a different, more empowering story (Hoffman, 1990).

Locating Social Constructionism within research

Although traditional quantitative, empirical research is recognized on many fronts as the primary way to make valid knowledge claims, traditional science tends to focus only on socially sanctioned research questions consistent with the ideology of the society (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). Becvar and Becvar (2003) add that the questions thought important to investigate are determined by the social/cultural context in which science operates, and by the problems and puzzles internal to scientific enquiry.

The dialogues on single-parent families have focused on their weaknesses rather than their strengths. The research questions asked have activated values and political sensitivities and are more likely to be supported and funded. These projects (Caplan & Nelson in Becvar & Becvar, 2003, p. 336) hold the potential for reinforcing

established stereotypes, thereby perpetuating the
conditions of the 'problem group'.

The social constructionist approach urges us to
abandon the obsession with truth and representation
(Longino in Becvar & Becvar, 2003). The aim of researchers
utilizing this method is to liberate people from the tight
boxes of normality and attempt to understand individual
human experiences. Within the social constructionist
framework, the 'objectivity-talk' of scientists becomes
just part of the discourse of science through which a
particular version of human life is constructed (Burr,
1995, p.160). Feminists view empiricist science as a tool
used by men to construct views of women that contribute to
their subjugation (Gergen, 1995).

Since one cannot be without an epistemology (Bateson
in Becvar & Becvar, 2003), the questions we ask about the
world, our theories and hypotheses arise from the
assumptions that are embedded in our epistemology. The task
of researchers, therefore, is to acknowledge and work with
their own intrinsic involvement in the research process and
the part that this plays in the interpretation of the
results. Social constructionist researchers view research

as a co-production between them and the people they are studying (Burr, 1995; Owen, 1992). Knowledge is constructed as "interpretive activity and a product of social and historical circumstances, rather than a more or less direct reflection of the world of objectively defined facts" (Henwood & Coughlan in Walters, 1998, p. 23).

The Foucaldian perspective regarding traditional positivistic production of knowledge is that knowledge is used to control people while making it appear as though it is in their (the people's) own interest, and with the stamp of 'science' to give such knowledge authority (Burr, 1995).

Gergen (1985) claims that social constructionists removed knowledge from the data-driven and/or the cognitively necessitated domains and placed it in the hands of people in relationships. Gergen (1985) further argues that, although casting doubt on the process of objective warranting, constructionism offers no alternative truth criteria; it does not provide any foundational rules of warrant and in this case it is relativistic. However, this does not mean that anything 'goes.' Lukens and Clarfield (1992) defend the 'anything goes' notion in Social Constructionism by saying that constructionists are

entitled, like any other profession, to choose among

alternatives and to express strong preferences about what

is 'right' and 'wrong'.

Not all views are equal and valid (Doan, 1997; Lukens

& Clarfield, 1992). Doan (1997) notes that some accounts

are not respectful of difference, gender, ethnicity, race

or religion (p. 130). Lukens and Clarfield (1992) disagree

with the assertion that constructionism is relativistic,

apolitical and impersonal. Social constructionists are not

prohibited from having and expressing preferences, hopes,

and opinions (Lukens & Clarfield, 1992, p. 205).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM REVISITED

From the social constructionist view, reality is co-

created between the observer and the observed; therefore,

one cannot remove oneself from the phenomenon that is being

observed. The society's construction of what a functional

family is has been created by social norms. This reminds us

for instance, that single parenthood and its meanings are

not fixed and inevitable: they are the product of

historical events, social forces and ideology (Hacking,

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1999). Single parents who accept current norms of emotion and behaviour may learn that the way they are supposed to feel and act is not predestined by human nature.

Hacking (1999) points out the fact that Social Constructionism does not always liberate. For example, a widowed father who believes that his family is 'broken' and 'dysfunctional' may not feel liberated. Social construction theses are liberating chiefly for those who are on the way to being liberated (Hacking, 1999, p. 2). For instance, the widowed father's consciousness about being a good enough single parent has to be raised first before he can be freed from the label that society has bestowed on him.

Maturana and Varela (1992) propose that if we know that our world is necessarily the world we bring forth with others, every time we are in conflict with another human being with whom we still want to coexist, we cannot affirm what for us is certain (an absolute truth) because that would negate the other person. It is not knowledge, but the knowledge of knowledge that compels (Maturana & Varela, 1992, p. 248).

It may appear as if the social constructionist stance demands us to be neutral and apolitical. On the contrary, such a view requires us to have our own opinions. Derrida's statement that "there is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]" was misunderstood by writers and philosophers as meaning that there is no truth, no reality, no actual history, no actual flesh-and-blood people in the world, no rocks and trees, disease, poverty or physical violence (Lucy, 1995, p. 1). Lucy (1995) remarks that, although Derrida said that there is nothing outside the text, it does not follow that anything goes, but rather that opinions, knowledge and stereotypes are not always what they seem to be.

MODERATE (SCIENTIFIC) REALISM CONSIDERED

The development of Social Constructionism, which is part of the postmodern movement, arose as a result of a critique of the positivists who claimed that the knower could have direct and objective knowledge of reality. This assertion, which was an extreme positivistic stance towards reality, resulted in the origin of a movement that also took an extreme stance towards reality, that is, Social Constructionism.

While the modern period seemed to embrace naively the philosophy of extreme realism, postmodernism has swung to the other extreme by advocating an equally unlikely thesis, namely the thesis of antirealism (Phipps, 2004, p. 360). Unlike both the philosophy of extreme realism and antirealism, moderate or scientific realism offers the more reasonable proposition that: (a) there is, actually, a reality that exists independently of the knower; and (b) although the knower cannot have direct or objective knowledge and, therefore, cannot establish truth, the knower can have partial knowledge of, or at least a perspective of it (Phipps, 2004, p. 361). The knower 'interfaces' with hard reality by means of language and linguistic behaviour (F.J.A. Snyders, personal communication, September 4, 2006). The advantage of this proposed view is that unlike realism which tends to overemphasize the known or reality, and antirealism the knower, moderate or scientific realism highlights that knowledge is a function of both the knower and the known, that is, it is the interaction between them (Phipps, 2004, p. 361).

Consistent with Phipps' proposal of moderate realism,

Speed (1991) proposes co-constructivism as an alternative

to realism, constructivism and Social Constructionism.

Speed's theory of co-constructivism embodies the view that

what we know arises in a relationship between the knower

and the known. Co-constructivism takes for granted that a

structured reality exists, but recognizes that this reality

is constructed or mediated in the sense that different

aspects are highlighted according to ideas that people,

individually or in groups, have about it (Speed, 1991, p.

401).

Speed (1991) maintains that adopting the co-

constructivist stance will allow therapists to acknowledge

the contribution both of ideas and a structured reality to

what we know. Two major implications of co-constructivism

are (1) a responsibility to be aware of how our ideas

determine what we see and (2), to do more empirical

research, to investigate the reality which exists and which

thus partially determines what we know (Speed, 1991, p.

405).

The next chapter deals with a review of related

literature. The review of the literature will start from

single parents in general and how the deficit model of

single parenting has viewed single parents. It will end

with how family normality is viewed from the cybernetics of

cybernetics perspective.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of available literature will start from the point of view of single parenting in general. Myths and realities of single parents and their families will focus on both single mother and single father families. Included in the literature will be the perceptions of society of men as single parents. Literature on the role of fathers in parenting and the sex-role identification of fathers will be interrogated. Literature on widowers as single fathers will also be examined, together with the social isolation and or systemic embeddedness of single-parent families. As single-parent families do not exist in isolation from a larger societal ecology, single parenting from an ecological perspective will be discussed. Finally, the normality of families according to a second-order cybernetics perspective will be evaluated.

Historical overview of the literature

There have always been single fathers, but the way in which men have found themselves in that position has changed completely in the last hundred and fifty years (Griffiths, 1997; Lund, 2001). In the 17th century, the same proportions of men were left single by the death of women, largely because of the risks of childbirth for women. According to Lund (2001), widowers either had to hire a nanny or housekeeper to take care of the children, or remarry as soon as possible after the death of their spouse. The last option was considered the most socially accepted solution.

It was not until the twentieth century that women were more likely than men to be single parents (Lund, 2001). Before this time, the man was more likely to provide and care for the children as the single parent.

According to Shapiro, Diamond and Greenberg (1995), in the agrarian communities of the past, the father was always a present figure in the family and he played a special role at the birth of his children. It was due to the industrial

revolution that the father's role at home diminished. In South Africa, due to the rise in deaths as a result of the AIDS pandemic, families find themselves without either the mother or the father. Statistics reveal that a high percentage of adults die from AIDS-related infections. The adult deaths increased by 62% from 1997 to 2002 (SA death statistics, 2005). Recorded deaths in the age-group 20-45 more than doubled between 1997 to 2002, from 106 033 to 221 260. According to a report by the South African Medical Research Council (2001), the mortality of young women has increased rapidly during the last few years, while the rise among men has been stable. Therefore, there should now be more families headed by males than in previous years.

Myths and realities of single parents
and their families

In trying to define what constitutes the family, Kennedy and Spencer King (1994) note that the debate about the definition of the family focuses on who the members are, rather than on how family members relate to one another. Kennedy and Spencer King (1994, p. xi) propose that the family is

made strong not by the number of heads counted at the

dinner table, but by the rituals that help to create

the family, by the memories you share, by the

commitment of time, caring and love you show to one

another, and by the hopes for the future you have as

individuals and as a unit.

This definition of the family is consistent with an

ecological definition of family. Auerswald (1990, p. 29)

defines a family, according to the ecological perspective,

as a patterned set of connected events in a relational

domain.

According to the mechological framework, a family is

defined as a complex object made of parts. The criteria

used to identify its parts are gender, age, and roles

(Auerswald, 1990, p. 28). This definition is similar to the

one that deficit models use.

A remarkably consistent view of single parenting

dominates popular culture as well as public policy. A

single-parent family is a euphemism for 'problem family'

and some kind of social pathology (Kamerman & Kahn in Dowd,

1997). Stigmatizing single parents is not strange in light

of the dominant legal and social definitions of family and
the exalted place in these definitions accorded to the
nuclear, marital, two-parent family (Dowd, 1997). Dowd
(1997) reports that this stigma is informed by the strongly
negative images we have of single mothers. They are
frequently criticized as inadequate, incomplete mothers who
do not mother enough. This stigma is more evident in
relation to Black single mothers.

The powerfully negative images associated with Black
single mothers rarely identify individuals, but instead
stigmatize the entire class of Black mothers (Dowd, 1997).
The dominant culture's view of unwed Black single mothers
continues to echo in the 1965 Moynihan report:

Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in
private and public affairs. The arrangements of
society facilitate such leadership and reward it.
A subculture such as that of the Negro American, in
which this is not the pattern, is placed at a
distinct disadvantage. Fatherless families are the
root of everything from poverty, violence, drug
addiction, crime and declining standards in
education and civility to teen pregnancy, sexually

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transmitted disease, narcissism and urban unrest.

(Moynihan in Dowd, 1997, p.10).

Without the role of husband, fathers are seen as
incapable caregivers, or more strongly, as parents who
routinely abandon their children. Men are viewed as parents
who see their children as their biological property, and
who are capable of the most horrifying abuse (Dowd, 1997).

Child development research did not study fathers at
all until the 1970's (Dowd, 1997). No one is taking any
notice of father. As any suburban father will testify,
today's family does not fall into a respectful hush when
father starts to speak. Much more ruthlessly, the father is
being ignored by the experts as a subject for research and
conjecture by sociologists, by revolutionaries and
journalists; father is forgotten. Researchers are all too
busy concentrating on mother (Green, 1976, p. 1). The only
time that father is spoken about is when he is being
irresponsible and abusive.

Abramovitch (1997) states that the picture society has
of men is that of savages who are not capable or worthy of
being good parents. Abramovitch (1997) adds that the image

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of fathers seems to have declined. They are now viewed as "foolish, self-centred 'slobs' whose children far exceed them in the once fatherly virtues of wisdom, maturity and discipline" (Abramovitch, 1997, p. 19).

According to a review of sociological literature, studies of single parenting rarely examine single-parent families as functional systems. The perception of most research appears to be: When a marriage dissolves, the family dissolves; if a marriage never starts, a family never starts (Gongla in Dowd, 1997, p. 13). The stigma we attach to single-parent families most significantly results in economic deprivation and the social isolation of these families. Studies on single-parent families have focused on problems encountered by these families and conclusions have been that single parent families are dysfunctional, broken, deviant and problem families (Javo, Ronning, Heyerdahl & Rudmin 2004; Snyman, 1993).

Studies done in South Africa and other countries focus on single motherhood and are based on the deficit model (Barrett & Turner, 2005; Dhlomo, 2001; Kuntsche & Silbereisen, 2004; McInnes, 2004; Roman, 2003). These studies focused on the problems experienced by single-

parent households. Any household that departs from the two-parent, nuclear-type is seen as dysfunctional rather than as a viable alternative. Monaghan-Leckband (1978) found that this view fails to acknowledge that problems can be found in two-parent families as well. Fathers in the deficit model studies are mentioned as being the cause of the problems in the family (Adam, Milner, & Scherpf, 1984). According to Snyman (1993), the single-parent situation inhibits the realisation of sociopedagogical essentials and gives rise to problematical educational situations.

The rise of single families is equated with social decline and the death of the real family (Dowd, 1997). Dowd (1997) goes on to state that the veneration of the nuclear marital two-parent family as a core social organisation of society does not, however, reflect the reality of family structures. Studies done on single parents, which concentrated on the deficits of such families, failed to take into account the fact that to define a family as functional does not mean that it has to have a particular structure. All families go through different stages and will adapt in order to survive. Maturana, in Becvar and Becvar (2003) points out that systems are structurally determined and will function according to their

composition. One of the problems in the study of single-parent families is society's definition of normality as it applies to the family system.

Positive attributes of single-parent families have been ignored due to the stigma that walls off any recognition of insights exemplified by single such families (Dowd, 1997). Single-parent families have much to tell us and teach us about the functioning of families and their interaction with broader communities. Kennedy and Spencer King (1994) emphasize that single-parent families are as diverse, and as similar, as any kind of family: "Single parent-families are large and small, demonstrative and reserved, neat and sloppy, even rich and sometimes broke" (Kennedy & Spencer King, 1994, p. 32)

Using a big brush to paint a picture of single-parent families, as if they had specific enduring characteristics gives the impression that such units are always in trouble and they need to be rescued by society. In the real world, far from the doom and gloom preaching of politicians, and the make-believe world of television and movies, ordinary mothers or fathers hold single-parent families together. These parents care fiercely for their children and

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exemplify the fact that children raised in single-parent families can grow into happy, responsible and emotionally healthy children (Kennedy & Spencer King, 1994). Scholars have begun to recognize the limitations of a negativistic, structural approach to the study of families (Dowd, 1997; Monaghan-Leckband, 1987). They have become aware, for example, that single-parent families are capable of being cohesive, warm, supportive, and favourable to the development of children.

According to Monaghan-Leckband (1978), the deficit model of single parenting focuses on the weaknesses of what it defines as deviant family units and fails to enquire as to the existence of positive elements within these units. The samples chosen for these studies are from poor, black, urban, female-headed families. Failure to include families with stable income and other resources confirms the deficit model. Not all single families are poor; similarly, not all two-parent families are financially stable.

Widows and widowers are faced with numerous challenges as single parents as compared to the divorced or the never-married single parent. The widow or widower is faced with the task of looking after the children, while he or she is

still grappling with the trauma of losing his or her spouse (Bustanoby, 1985; Manganyi, 1994). Becvar and Becvar (2003) acknowledge the fact that change in the structure of the family that occurs as a result of single parenthood poses some difficulties to both children and parent. Children do adjust to the changes associated with life in a single household (Burgess, 1995; Greif, 1995; O'Neill & Mendelsohn, 2001).

Role of fathers in parenting

In trying to clarify terminology, Tanfer and Mott in Sullivan (2000, p. 2) distinguish between 'fatherhood' as a status attained by having a child, and 'fathering' that includes the procreative act and all the childrearing roles that fathers may fulfill. Sullivan (2000, p. 2) further elaborates on the distinction made by Tanfer and Mott by saying that 'social fatherhood' is more meaningful than biological fatherhood.

The concept of 'role' is defined by Heiss in Mendes (1975, p. 7) as a prescription for interpersonal behaviours that are associated particularly with socially recognized categories of persons. Burgess (1995, p. 448) defines roles

as prescriptions and expectations of the self and others for the behaviours that are required in any particular situation.

Fathers play an important role in parenting, and the degree of their involvement is culturally determined. Marsiglio in Sullivan (2000) argues that the images of fatherhood include stereotypes and ideal, as well as some not so ideal images (p. 2). Adam et al (1984) describe the father's role in polyandry marriages in the Marquesas Islands. One woman marries several men; among them there is a head husband and a secondary husband. The head husband disciplines the children and serves as a sex-role model for the children. The secondary husband maternally loves, supports and nurtures the children. The Trobiand Islanders of Malenesia do not recognise biological fatherhood. The man holds two roles, that of a father to his sister's children and that of a mother to his own children.

The endless variety of family structures shows that it was culture, not biology, which dictated child-rearing practices (Adam et al, 1984; Levine, 1976). Margaret Mead suggested that any claim for an innate nurturing potential in women, or for a biologically rooted dependence of

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children on their mothers alone was susceptible to becoming

a new and subtle form of antifeminism in which men, under

the guise of exalting maternity, are tying women more

tightly to their children (Levine, 1976, p. 25).

Nevertheless, research into child development proceeded in

the 1950's and 1980's with an almost singular fixation on

the relationships between children and their mothers, with

Bowlby's hypothesis providing a guiding framework (Levine,

1976).

Father-custodian families face certain unique problems

because of their atypical status in our culture. They exist

in a climate of prejudice, disapproval, or at best

wariness. This creates difficulties in several domains and

many people express their doubts about the father's ability

to perform as a single parent (Warshak, 1987). Single

fathers are confronted with the stereotyped roles given to

them by society. Stereotypes are general beliefs and

expectations about people which result in people

simplifying complexity by systematizing and ordering

information into categories (Grieve & van Deventer, 2005).

Grieve and van Deventer (2005) further state that

stereotypes create expectations that allow us to perceive

selectively, recognize information that confirms our

expectations, and overlook information that refutes our

expectations. For many men, gaining sole custody of their

child, rather than being present at the birth, is when they

first experience what truly becoming a father is like

(Greif, 1995).

According to Parsons' and Bales' sex role theory

(1956), the family is a sub-system within the larger system

of society. Parsons and Bales (1956) distinguish two

parental roles in the nuclear family: the instrumental and

expressive roles. The father traditionally plays the

instrumental role. His primary responsibility is to liaise

between the family and society. The mother, on the other

hand plays the expressive role. She is the nurturer, loves

her children unconditionally and allows them to grow in a

loving environment that promotes emotional well-being.

Men's roles in parenting have been seen only in terms of

being financial provider to the family, while mothers have

been viewed as the nurturers (Parsons & Bales, 1955).

Pollack (1995) argues that men's nurturing urge, often

suppressed in boyhood and adult socialization tasks, could

be stimulated dramatically by becoming a father. Lamb

(1995) adds that in the last decade and a half,

professional and public interest in the roles played by
fathers in their children's development has increased
enormously. In this era of paternal rediscovery,
psychologists believe that fathers might have an important
role to play in childrearing (Lamb, 1995). This refocus
highlights a shift from a concern with fathers as persons
primarily involved in the economic support of the family,
and perhaps in the discipline and control of older
children, to a view that placed increasing emphasis on the
role that fathers play in the direct care of their children
(Lamb, 1995).

To understand the current concern and confusion about
fatherhood, it may be useful to step back historically and
examine the changes in the conceptualization of paternal
roles that have taken place. According to Pleck in Lamb
(1995), one can identify four phases or periods over the
last two centuries of American social history where a
different dominant image of fathers came into focus.

Moral Father

The earliest phase was one that extended from Puritan
times through the Colonial period into early Republican
times (Lamb, 1995). The ideal father of the colonial period
was the stern patriarch (Pleck in Lamb, 1995). During this
period, the father's role was perceived as being dominated
by responsibility for moral supervision and moral teaching.
Fathers were primarily responsible for ensuring that their
children grew up with an appropriate sense of values,
acquired primarily from the study of religious material
like the Bible. Therefore, it was the father's duty to
ensure that his children were literate so that they could
read the scriptures.

The father's role as a moral guardian was to ensure
that the children were academically equipped to adopt and
maintain Christian ways (Lamb, 1995). Nsamenang (1985)
states that West African fathers are the explorers of the
world outside the home and their role is to filter the
beliefs, attitudes, and practices of their society. The
West African father adopts tenets like those found in the

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Bible and cultural taboos to teach morality and acceptable
behaviour.

The Breadwinner

 A shift occurred in the dominant conceptualization of
the father's role around the time of centralized
industrialization (Pleck in Lamb, 1995). Pleck in Lamb
(1995) further points out that instead of being defined in
terms of moral teaching, the father's role came to be
defined largely in terms of being a financial provider for
the family. This conceptualization of the father endured
from the mid-nineteenth century through the Great
Depression. Because breadwinning became so central to
fatherhood in the nineteenth century, the failure to
support a family, always a grievous sin, took centre stage
in Victorian melodrama (Pleck in Lamb, 1995). The other
aspects of the father's role, such as the presumed
responsibility for moral guardianship, did not disappear,
but breadwinning came into focus as the most defining
characteristic of fatherhood (Lamb, 1995).

The Gender-Role Model

The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the disruption brought about by the Second World War occasioned a new conceptualization of fatherhood (Lamb, 1995). Breadwinning and moral guardianship roles remained important, but the focus shifted to the father's function as a gender role model. This shift arose because of the concern that boys raised exclusively by women were becoming overly feminized (Mintz in Talitwala, 2005). The family professionals called on fathers to become more involved with their sons, provide sex education and serve as role models of masculine maturity (Talitwala, 2005, p. 8).

The New Nurturant Father

The fourth stage was finally reached around the mid-1970's (Lamb, 1995). For the first time fathers were perceived as active, nurturant, caretaking parents. Active parenting was defined as the central component of fatherhood and as the yardstick by which 'good fathers' might be assessed (Lamb, 1995, p. 21). Blackenhorn in Dowd (1997) criticizes and demolishes 'the New Father', the sensitive, caring, involved father, because the new father looks too much like a father who

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has learned to mother. Blackenhorn in Dowd (1997) argues that children's needs can only be met by mothers and fathers adopting gender specific roles. Furthermore, he argues, the notion of androgynous parenting is nothing more than a selfish desire grounded in individualistic narcissism:

> It is a denial of sexual complementarity and ultimately a denial of generativity, which is, much more than the female's, largely a social construction … (Blackenhorn in Dowd, 1997, p. 30)

Blackenhorn's qualities of good fathering sound like the stereotype of the traditional father (Dowd, 1997). Jackson (1987) argues that fathers who express non-traditional beliefs about parental roles feel more competent in their roles of single parenting.

Besides financial and emotional challenges, often the little things prove to be the toughest. Some parents said that they found it very difficult to combine the two roles, to be loving and affectionate but also to be the disciplinarian (Shaw, 2005). A single father or mother is faced with the difficulty of fulfilling both these roles.

According to Ehrensaft (1995), fathers have a nine-to-five quality to their parenting. Men do mothering whereas women are mothers. This means that men exhibit more separateness when parenting and women more connectedness. Ehrensaft (1995) believes that a father is much clearer as to where he stops and the child starts, whereas mothers have a hard time sorting out their own needs from their children's.

Fathers today have permission, tentative and unsure, but permission nonetheless, to be more emotionally present in their families, rather than having fatherhood defined primarily by the breadwinner/provider role (Osherson, 1997). The fact that fathers can be more than breadwinners or providers in their families could be one reason why some studies (Burgess, 1998; Greif, 1990; Monaghan-Leckband, 1978) found widowed men to cope better with lone parenting than widowed women.

Lamb (1997) claims that a good enough father is expected to be close but not too close, strong but not overwhelming. The difficulty for fathers at times is how to combine the contrasting images of authority and intimacy into a coherent whole. Osherson (1995) believes that the

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very definition of what it means to be a good father has
shifted from being concerned primarily with the
provider/breadwinner role to embracing more ambiguous
expectations of emotional involvement and responsiveness:
"We live in a time with many contradictory demands on men—
that we be open with our feelings but also be able to get
the job done, that we be expressive but also stoic, be
gentle but also strong and be able to protect and defend"
(Osherson, 1995, p. 208).

There is no single father role to which all fathers
should aspire. Rather, a successful father, as defined in
terms of his children's development, is one whose role
performance matches the demands and prescriptions of his
socio-cultural and familial context (Lamb, 1997). According
to Berger and Luckmann in Kost (2001), roles within the
family such as father and mother are constructed by
society. These 'agreed-upon meanings' would change over
time and individual behaviours and routines associated with
these roles will adapt in response to these different
meanings (Kost, 2001).

Widowers as single parents

The death of a spouse is considered the most traumatic of all life's experiences (Burgess, 1995; O'Neill & Mendelsohn, 2001; Rando, 1988). Depending on the relationship one had during one's marriage, the loss of a spouse is a major loss in one's life. For most of us, the relationship with our mate is a critically important and exclusive one (Rando, 1988, p. 27). One of the major roles one's spouse had was as someone who affirmed your identity, someone who helped define who one was in many diverse ways. Losing a spouse means that one lost someone who probably perceived the world in the same way, someone who probably shared the same opinions about common friends and so forth. Unless one had time to anticipate and rehearse new roles because of the length of a spouse's illness, one may have many new tasks to learn as one attempts to get used to life without a mate (Rando, 1988, p. 129).

Burgess (1995, p. 448) defines a widowed father as a man who assumes custody and primary care of his children following the death of his wife. Death as the cause of single parenthood and how it affects the father of a nuclear family are topics that are rarely examined,

especially when dealing with men as single parents with children of school-going age (O'Neill & Mendelsohn, 2001). Burgess (1985, p. 416) states:

> The problem with travelling on unchartered waters is that one has no 'maps' with which to check one's course. So it is with writing a chapter on widowers as fathers.

All parents need to develop a balance between their own needs and those of their children (Silverman in Boerner & Silverman, 2001). Most bereaved parents do this with varying degrees of sensitivity and responsiveness to their offspring's needs. Fathers tend to assume a parent-oriented and administrative style, while mothers generally reflect a more child-oriented and nurturing style (Boerner & Silverman, 2001). Traditionally, black men are not perceived as being capable of looking after the children. The father's in-laws may demand custody of the children after the death of their mother.

Single fathers adjust well to their new role of parenting if there is no hostility regarding custody of the children (Cohen, 1995). Greif (1990) and Christofferson

(1998) argue that widowers manage to take care of their

children just as well as other single fathers and generally

do a better job than single mothers in the same situation.

They may struggle initially to adjust to the new role, as

they are not only dealing with their new responsibilities,

but are also faced with their children's and their own

pain. Greif's (1990) study of 36 widowers found, that with

time, most fathers and their children cope. Single fathers

who choose the single-parent role tend to have an easier

task than those who are forced into adopting it (Greif,

1995).

A study by Boerner and Silverman (2001) concludes that

men and women have different coping patterns after the loss

of a spouse. Men perceive loss in terms of its meaning in

their own life, focusing on the future without their wives.

They frequently frame their thoughts in terms of the long-

term consequences of the loss. Mothers, on the other hand,

seem to focus more on the family's day-to-day activities.

While widowed fathers continue to fulfill the

traditional role of provider in the family, they are also

capable of giving loving care to the children who need

emotional and physical support (Burgess, 1995). Men become

very good parents when given the opportunity to look after their children (Burgess, 1995; Bustanoby, 1985). Burgess (1995) further states that the widowed father finds it less difficult to adjust to the new role of sole parenting if he was involved in child-rearing while the wife was still alive.

The circumstances surrounding the death of the wife also have an effect on the adjustment process. Whether death happened suddenly or resulted from a chronic illness makes a difference in terms of the father's adjustment (Sanders, 1999; Volkan & Zintl, 1997). To the extent that there was time for appropriate preparation, fathers tend to experience less of an assault on their ability to cope than when the wife's death is totally unexpected (Rando, 1988, p. 52). Weizman and Kamm (1987) state that it is natural for the bereaved person to mull over the circumstance of any death, but when the loss has been sudden because of heart a attack, stroke, accident, or the result of horrifying events, it takes even longer to recover.

Single parenting is not easy under any circumstances; it is particularly overwhelming when you are simultaneously struggling to cope with the loss of your loved one

(Burgess, 1995; Rando, 1988). Rando (1988, p. 135) claims that:

> The death of your spouse confronts you with the loss of a significant part of yourself, someone who was crucial in helping you define yourself and your world. More than many losses, it can prompt the need for major identity changes and assumptions of new skills and roles that may challenge much of your previous sex-role conditioning and experience.

Adjusting to single-parent status is a process that one goes through by learning to cope with the new demands of one's changed parenting role and by establishing one's identity as a single person (O'Neill & Mendelsohn, 2001, p. 179).

Sex-role identification

According to Dowd (1997), the sex-role hypothesis is often connected to the Freudian assumption that both a mother and a father must be present for appropriate sex-role and normal child development. Freudian and cognitive theories of child development hypothesize that children

learn through modelling, particularly by identifying with the same-sex parent. However, Belchman and Carlson in Dowd (1997) found that studies concluded that two heterosexual parents are not necessary for healthy cognitive, emotional, or sex-role development. High quality parenting in single parent families can compensate for lack of the other parent, while low quality parenting can negatively influence children's development in intact two-parent homes (Belchman & Carlson in Dowd, 1997).

Pedersen (1981) argues that the traditional theoretical approach to female and male behaviour has been in terms of a unidimensional, bipolar construct in which masculinity-femininity is roughly equated with the instrumental-expressive dimensions. Rather than using the 'either/or' theory when describing sex-roles, the 'both/and' theory may be useful. It has been found that many men and women are androgynous (Pedersen, 1981). They are more likely to perform cross-sex behaviour and are less constrained by sex-role stereotypes.

Lamb (1997) asserts that fathers and mothers seem to influence their children in similar, rather than dissimilar ways. Lamb (1997) further states that characteristics of individual fathers, such as their masculinity, intellect, and

even their warmth are less important than the characteristics
of the relationships that they have established with their
children. Studies on father-infant relationships (Lamb, 1997)
showed that both mothers and fathers are capable of behaving
sensitively and responsively in interaction with their infants.
With the exception of lactation, there is no evidence that
women are biologically predisposed to be better parents than
men are. Lamb (1997) further argues that social conventions,
not biological imperatives, underlie the traditional division
of parental responsibilities. According to Biller and Lopez-
Kimpton (1997), children who experience positive father
involvement are likely to develop their personal resources and
social competence.

Hosley and Montemayor (1997) explored the difference
between father-adolescent and mother-adolescent
relationships, and their findings showed fathers to be a
weak link in the companionate family. These conclusions,
which portray fathers as worse parents than mothers, are
based on the deficit approach of single parenting.

How a man defines his role within the family is
important in shaping his interactions with his children
(Hosley & Montemayor, 1997). Fathers may not be as

uninvolved and distant as the research suggests. Instead,
the findings may be based on the instruments used, which
may be focusing on the negative characteristics of fathers
(Hosley & Montemayor, 1997). In a society that relies
heavily on 'experts', it is important to realize that what
the experts tell us depends largely on the questions they
ask or the questions they consider important (or possible)
to ask (Levine, 1976, p. 23).

Lewis (1997) states that if there are differences
between mothers and fathers, these are not easy to measure
and do not have the demonstrable effects on the child that
were once assumed in the child development literature.
Lewis (1997) argues that rather than looking for simple
cause-effect patterns, one needs to examine the effects of
a network of family relationships on the child's
development. The family is a sociological microcosm where
negotiations between members and displays of affection,
interest and instruction may tell us more about the system
than the individuals concerned (Lewis, 1997).

Social isolation and or systemic embeddedness

of single parent families

The African proverb that says that it takes the whole
village to raise a child is very meaningful for single
parents. Very few single parents are alone in caring for
their children. The extended family is always available to
help the lone parent take care of the children. In the
traditional African context, marriage does not simply place
between a man and a woman as in Western societies where it
ideally follows the love, interest and free personal choice
of the individuals; marriage occurs between families or
even communities (Nsamenang, 1987). Therefore, if one
spouse dies, the extended family or the community will help
the remaining spouse to take care of his nuclear family.
Several studies (Burgess, 1995; Bustanoby, 1985; Greif,
1990; Greif, 1995; Monaghan-Leckband, 1978) have shown that
widowers receive more support from the extended family than
other parents.

The deficit model of single parenting claims that
single parents are more emotionally and socially isolated
than parents in two parent families (Monaghan-Leckband,
1978). Jones (1985) maintains that a single parent is less

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likely to be parenting alone than is suggested by the term *single parent*. Single parents often seek help from other family members and friends. According to Leinonen, Solantus and Punamaki (2003), single parents experience more emotional and instrumental support than parents with spouses.

Makhudu (1993) points out that the development of human potential requires traits such as warmth, understanding, reciprocation and cooperation, which collectively make up the Ubuntu culture. Makhudu (1993) regards the qualities that make up the Ubuntu way of life, or true humaneness, as existing in every person, irrespective of the culture to which they belong: "A person is a person through other persons", "n Mens is n mens deur ander mense" (Afrikaans). Simply put it reads: "I am, because you are" which is at the heart of an African way of thinking (Makhudu, 1993, p. 40).

According to Ladd and Zvonkovic (1995), cross-cultural research indicates that the type of social network varies between and within cultural groups. Gunnarsson and Cochran in Ladd and Zvonkovic (1995) compared married and divorced mothers from Sweden and the United States and found that

the support network of all single mothers was smaller due
to the loss of the ex-spouse's relatives. The Mexican
American single women were isolated from their friendship
network but remained closer to their extended kin (Wagner
in Ladd & Zvonkovic, 1995).

Social support in the Black culture is highly valued
and a major strength of Black family life lies in its
social support system. Aunts and grandmothers are always
available to look after children when parents are not able
to do so. Every grown-up is seen as a parent; therefore,
there is a saying in the African tradition that there are
no orphans as long as there is a community. Viewing single-
parent families against this background challenges the
deficit model of single parents and their families. The
extended family ties are not as strong as they have been
since urbanization, but there is still a sense of
responsibility towards one another. The widower appears to
get more support and sympathy from their kin than the never
married and divorced parent (Bustanoby, 1985).

A study by Monaghan- Leckband (1978) consisting of 40
female and 20 male single parents challenges the claim by
the deficit model of single parenthood that asserts that

single parents are emotionally and socially isolated from their kinship and friendship network. Most of the respondents reported that they did not interact with friends and relatives as frequently when they were married as they did when they became single parents. The study concludes that the health of the two-parent family is overrated at the expense of other family units. Monaghan-Leckband (1978) argues that the idealization of the two-parent family has masked both its weaknesses and the strengths of the single parent family. Only a few of the respondents reported a sharp decrease in kinship interaction. A strong parental coalition, such as that between single parents and their own parents, is a feature of higher functioning single parent families (Minuchin, Rosman, & Baker, 1978).

Challenges for single fathers

In a traditional two-parent family, the mother is the parent who is generally expected to shop, prepare meals for the children, do laundry and keep the children and the house clean. In one-parent families, the responsibility for these tasks rests with the single parent; since these

activities are usually assigned to women, single male
parents may experience role strain (Mendes, 1978; Prater,
1995; Shireman, 1995). Single parenting is not easy for any
parent, be it a single mother or a single father. The
remaining parent has to change the way they feel about
themselves. Their career plans may have to be redefined.
They are at times forced to reduce their working hours,
resulting in a lower salary. Shaw (2005) states that,
although single parents vary in shape, size, sex and
circumstance, the one factor most have in common is that
they never expected to end up as single parents.

Financial difficulties

Loss of income from one spouse as happens in widowhood
is a major problem faced by the widower. Unlike a divorced
parent who may receive maintenance from the other parent,
the widower does not. Lino (1995) claims that the poverty
rate among the widowed and the never-married single parent
is higher than it is for the divorced. For employed single
mothers/fathers, child care can be a large expense (Lino,
1995).

Social interaction/redefinition of role

When men enter the role of single parenthood following the death of their wives, it causes difficulty in many relationships with others (Lund, 2001). During this phase of the man's life, there is a restructuring of roles, which occurs in both his personal and public life. The implications and consequences for the widower and how he addresses the issue of being a single parent are based largely on how he defines the new role through interactions with others (Lund, 2001).

SINGLE PARENTING FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Auerswald (1990), the rules of an ecological paradigm in family therapy do not include an either/or dualism and the confrontations and paradoxes which this creates; they do not adhere to linear time and causality. These rules require that attention be paid to patterned sets of events and how they are connected; the domain of relational connectedness (Auerswald, 1990, p. 36).

To help in the understanding of single parents in different social environments, the ecological approach will be introduced. The ecological perspective provides the structural and functional framework for the analysis of single-parent families. In the ecological framework, what happens outside the family unit also influences what happens within it (Burgess, 1995).

Obiechina in Nsamenang (1987, p. 279), vividly portrays the relationship between the individual and his community as follows:

> The West African stories tend to show the
> individual characters not through their private
> psychological experiences, but through
> community and social life and activities of
> collective and general nature with individual
> sentiments and actions deriving force and logic
> from those of the community.

This perspective views single parents and their environments as mutually shaping systems, each changing over time, and adapting to changes in each other.

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Four different levels of systems that affect the family
will be discussed:

Microsystems

Microsystems are settings in which individuals
experience and create day-to-day reality (Hanson, 1985, p.
57). The family is a microsystem within which the widower
and children interact together (Burgess, 1995).

Mesosystems

Mesosystems are the relationships between several
microsystems, including extended family members and friends
(Burgess, 1995). When the single parent receives support
from relatives and friends, children are much less likely
to develop behaviour or educational problems
(Bronfenbrenner in Burgess, 1995).

Ecosystems

Ecosystems involve ongoing patterns of interaction
between settings that include home, child care programmes,
the school, and the parent's place of work (Burgess, 1995).

Widowers are unable to escape the demands of their work as they are the only support to their children. The business world is not sympathetic towards widowed fathers.

Macrosystems

A macrosystem refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture such as religion, which protect the sanctity of the family (Burgess, 1995). Microsystems, mesosystems and ecosystems are set within the macrosystem.

CYBERNETICS OF CYBERNETICS VIEW OF

FAMILY NORMALITY

Early efforts at understanding family functioning employed a deficit model focussing on structure rather than on process (Monaghan-Leckband, 1987). This pattern of doomsday thinking has been most apparent in discussions revolving around concerns that the prevalence of deviations from the traditional two-parent family will inevitably produce negative consequences for children (Coontz in Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

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Becvar and Becvar (2003) described a cybernetics of cybernetics view of family normality. Given the notion of structural determinism, systems respond to various perturbations in a manner consistent with its structure. Therefore, all systems do what they do, and what they do is not pathological unless we so define it. Welsh in Becvar and Becvar (2003) states that: "the guiding question is that of how families with variant forms and requisites, organise their resources and function to accomplish their objectives" (p. 106). We are more concerned with how families do best what it is they want to do than we are with what they are doing (Bevcar & Becvar, 2003). Finally, well-functioning families have a transcendental value system that embodies a sense of relatedness and continuity in terms of both time and space.

The next chapter will deal with the methodology that will be used in exploring the experiences of widowers as single parents. Since the aim is not to generalise the findings, a qualitative approach will be used. This approach will enable the researcher to a fuller understanding, through their stories, of how widowers experience single parenthood.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology that will be used in an attempt to create voices for widowed single fathers. The chapter covers the following aspects: Qualitative research as a method of study; Social Constructionism as a qualitative approach; sampling; data collection; data analysis, namely thematic analysis; trustworthiness of qualitative studies, and ethical issues.

Traditionally, research has been conceived as a creation of true, objective knowledge, following a scientific method (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). "From what appears or is presented as data, facts, the unequivocal imprints of 'reality', it is possible to acquire a reasonably adequate basis for empirically grounded conclusions and, as a next step, for generalizations and theory-building" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 1).

De Vos et al (2005, p. 3) use *Webster's Dictionary* definition of science as "accumulated and accepted knowledge that has been systemized and formulated with reference to the discovery of general truths or the operation of general laws … especially knowledge obtained and tested through use of the scientific method". The scientific method refers to ideas, rules, techniques and approaches used by a group of people sharing the same norms for both research activity and acceptance of scientific findings and explanations (de Vos et al 2005, p. 5). It is based on the aforementioned definition of research that qualitative research is seen as being 'sloppy' by quantitative researchers.

Qualitative research paradigm

The qualitative research paradigm stems from an anti-positivistic, interpretive approach. It is holistic in nature and aims mainly to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life (Fouche & Delport, 2002, p. 79). Qualitative research produces descriptive data in the participant's own written or spoken words. The qualitative researcher is therefore concerned with the understanding (*verstehen*) rather than with the

explanation and subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider. This is opposed to the outsider perspective that is predominant in the quantitative paradigm (Fouche & Delport, p. 79).

Qualitative research implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13). Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.

Consistent with qualitative research, Avesson and Skoldberg (2000) state that knowledge cannot be separated from the knower. They (Avesson & Skoldberg, 2000) say that data and facts are the constructions or results of interpretation.

In an effort to move beyond the current pathological view of single parenting, I sought a method that lent itself more fully to the portrayal of the fluctuations and

many dimensions of the human experience. The central assumption of the methodology of this study is that "the way people talk about their lives is important and the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world they see and in which they act" (Gilligan in Simmons, 1984, p. 61).

A major factor in the methodology selection was the recognition of the significance of the personal involvement of the researcher. My interest in single parenting did not just 'happen' but was generated because of who I am and my experiences, past and present, and my own understanding, interpretation and re-interpretation of those experiences. I wanted a methodology that provided new possibilities and thought about single parenting.

Social Constructionism

The qualitative approach chosen for this study is informed by Social Constructionism. According to Becvar and Becvar (2003, p. 92), Social Constructionism is dedicated to the understanding of the development of knowledge about human beings and their behaviours in order to generate more livable accounts of them and their behaviour.

Social Constructionism understands reality, knowledge, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities (Anderson, 1994, p. 1). From the social constructionist perspective, language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it and it creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable (Shotter in Billig, 1988, p. 13). Efran, Lukens and Lukens (1990) add that it is through language that meanings are created. The words we use have arbitrary meanings, but once words become attached to particular meanings, they are 'fixed' in that relationship so that the same word always has the same meaning (Burr, 1995, p. 39).

Language is a fundamentally social phenomenon; it is something that occurs between people, whether they are having a conversation, writing a letter or book (Burr, 1995). It is in such exchanges between people that the construction of the meaning can take place. Burr (1995, p. 59) adds that language has the capacity to transcend the 'here and now', thereby bridging different zones with the reality of everyday life by integrating them into a meaningful whole. Social Constructionism invites an

analysis of how we construct and use our professional

knowledge (Becvar & Becvar, 2003).

Owen (1992) describes Social Constructionism as the

claim and viewpoint that the content of our consciousness

is taught by our culture and society. Dickerson & Zimmerman

(cited in Rapmund, 2005) state that the social

constructionist perspective locates meaning in the

understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over

time. This approach is coherent with the research

statement, as it will enable the researcher to gain in-

depth information about the proposed study. The researcher

does not claim to know what the findings of the study will

be.

According to Becvar and Becvar (2003), the goal of

Social Constructionism provides for a more humane and more

socially and politically sensitive understanding of

families. Meaning is not given to the situation, but

emerges from it (Bakhtin, cited in Maykut & Morehouse,

1994).

Sampling

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), qualitative
researchers set out to build a sample that includes people
selected with the goal of gaining deep understanding of a
particular phenomenon experienced by a carefully selected
group of people. Purposive sampling is used for this study.
Neuman (1997) explains that the rationale of purposive
sampling is less to generalize to a larger population than
it is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon
under study. Four participants were used for the study
since they were the only ones available and willing to take
part in the study. Others felt that they did not want to
talk about issues relating to their parenting and the loss
of their spouses.

Sampling size

This study is based on interviews conducted with four
widowed fathers, two Black and two White, residing in
Gauteng. These fathers had to have a child or children
below 18 years of age and who stay with them full-time. The
selection of participants depended on the availability and
willingness of the participants to take part in the study.

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Sampling problems

Finding widowers who were still single parents was difficult. Friends and colleagues who were asked if they knew single widowed fathers said: "fathers always marry as soon as they can after the death of their wives, why don't you use single mothers, there are plenty of those". One lady from a support group responded like this when I asked her if she perhaps knew any white or black widowers: "In the twenty years that I have worked for this organization, I have never seen or heard of white widowers". This showed the stereotypes around men as single parents and widowers.

Contacting participants

Three of the participants were selected on the basis of information from the oncology unit of a private hospital in Pretoria. The social worker was excited to hear that I intended to study widowed single fathers. She said that there were many fathers who lost their wives due to cancer. I anticipated problems regarding the willingness of the participants to explore their feelings surrounding their changed role, as they might have to revisit the painful memories surrounding the loss of their wives. The researcher was aware of a need for a safe space to be

created for the participants. The fourth participant was

discovered as a result of a recommendation from a friend.

The four fathers were very eager to take part in the study.

The social worker made the initial contact with the fathers

and I telephoned them to explain the nature of the study

and to arrange for interviews.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews are used for this study with the

goal of exploring the participants' experiences. The

following questions or exploratory comments were developed

as guidelines for the interviewing process:

- When did your wife die?

- How did she die?

- How did it feel you when you first became a
  single parent?

- Did you have to make any adjustments—
  (a) in your job?
  (b) socially?
  (c) learn new skills, like cooking?

- How has being single affected your social life?

- Who helps you with the children?

- Did any community agency such as the school or church help in any way?

- What do you think are the best things about being a single parent?

- What are the challenges of single parenting?

- How do you think your child/ren rate you as a parent?

- How do you rate yourself as a parent?

- Could you have done anything differently regarding your single parenting so far?

- If you had a chance to meet someone who has just lost a wife and has children to look after by himself, what would you say to him?

According to (Greeff, 2005; Kahn & Cannell in Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Maytuk & Morehouse, 1994), interviews are defined as a conversation with a purpose. Kvale in Greeff (2005) states that qualitative interviews are attempts to understand the world from the participant's point of view. The purpose of interviews is not to get answers to questions, but to understand the experiences of people and the meaning they make of their experience (Greeff, 2005).

All interviews were audio-taped and the participants granted written permission for the audio-taping of the interviews. These recordings were transcribed word for word and the resulting texts analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, fascinating and creative process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion. It is not neat (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). Marshall and Rossman (1999) further states that data collection and analysis go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation of the data. Geertz in Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999, p. 139) says that the purpose of interpretive analysis is to provide 'thick description' by which is meant a thorough description of the characteristics, processes, transactions and contexts that constitute the phenomenon being studied. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) and Maytuk and Morehouse (1999), in qualitative studies there is no clear point where data collection stops and analysis begins. In this study, data analysis started during the interview process.

The initial step in data analysis includes awareness by the researcher of her preconceived ideas (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The researcher engages to remove, or at least be aware of prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation; this process is called 'epoche' by Katz in Maykut & Morehouse (1994, p. 123). Going through the process of epoche helped the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh and open view, without prejudgment or imposing meaning too soon.

Thematic content analysis is used to interpret data. Thematic analysis involves identifying particular themes that occur in the material that is being studied. The following steps are just a helpful starting point, as data analysis is not always neat in qualitative studies. The steps that the researcher follows in data analysis are discussed by Terre Blanche & Kelly (1999) as follows:

Step 1: Familiarization and immersion

Data gathering is not just a mindless technical exercise, but involves the development of ideas and theories about the phenomenon being studied. Preliminary understanding of the meaning of the data was acquired before the process of data analysis began. This process enabled the researcher to familiarize herself with the data. The researcher listened to the tapes and read the transcribed interviews. The texts were read through many times over, and notes, diagrams, and drawings were made.

Step 2: Inducing themes

Induction means to infer general rules or classes from specific instances. The researcher looked at the material and worked out what the organizing principles are that naturally underscore the material. The language of the participants was used rather than abstract theoretical language to label categories. Processes, functions, tensions and contradictions were examined. The researcher attempted to isolate three or more emergent themes to achieve an optimum level of complexity.

Step 3: Coding

Coding is undertaken during the activity of developing themes. Using the same colour highlighter for words with similar meanings will mark different sections that are relevant to one or more themes. The text is then broken down into meaningful pieces and labelled.

Step 4: Elaboration

Themes are explored more closely. The purpose is to capture the nuances of meaning not captured by coding alone. Coding and elaboration are carried out until no further significant insights emerge.

Step 5: Interpretation and checking

This is the final step where the phenomenon that is studied is put together. Thematic categories are used as subheadings. Thematic analysis involves identifying the common themes from the information and using excerpts from the information to substantiate those themes (Rapmund, 2005). The researcher then goes through the interpretation and looks for contradictions.

Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research

Validity in qualitative research refers to research that is plausible, credible and trustworthy (Burke, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that naturalistic (qualitative) studies are accused of being undisciplined; that the qualitative researcher is guilty of 'sloppy' research and they (qualitative researchers) engage in 'merely subjective' observations, responding indiscriminately to the 'loudest bangs' or the 'brightest lights' (p. 289).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue against the use of the following terms in qualitative studies: internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. They (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) demonstrate how inappropriate these constructs are for qualitative inquiry. The following are four alternative constructs that more accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm (Lincoln & Guba in de Vos, 2004, p. 351):

Credibility

This is the alternative to internal validity, in which the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry is conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject is accurately identified and described. The ultimate test of internal validity for the conventional (quantitative) inquirer is the extent to which the findings of an inquiry display an isomorphism (a one-to-one relationship) with that reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 294). But the determination of such isomorphism is in principle impossible, as the enquirer would need to know the nature of that ultimate tangible reality a *priori*. It is the nature of that reality that is at issue; if one already 'knew' it there would be no need to mount an inquiry to determine it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 395).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 295), the test of isomorphism is, therefore, in principle impossible to apply within the conventional paradigm, but it is the best method of choice for the naturalist. To be able to demonstrate 'truth value', the naturalist must show that he or she has represented these multiple constructions adequately; that is, that the reconstructions that have

been arrived at via the inquiry are credible to the

constructors of the original multiple realities (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the implementation

of a credibility criterion is twofold. To carry the inquiry

in such a way that the probability that the findings will

be found to be credible is enhanced and, secondly, to

demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them

approved by the constructors of the multiple realities

being studied. Participants in this study are given

summaries of the interviews in order to confirm the

accuracy of the stories; that is, they have to approve the

researcher's construction of the study's multiple

realities. After reading the summaries, the participants

confirmed my interpretation of their stories as being a

true reflection. Stiles (1993, p. 605) calls this process

'iteration', which involves a movement between

interpretation and observation.

Transferability

This is the alternative to external validity or

generalisability, in which the burden of demonstrating the

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applicability of one set of findings to another context

rests more with the investigator who would make the

transfer, than with the original investigator.

Transferability is achieved by producing detailed and rich

descriptions of contexts. These give readers detailed

accounts of the structures of meanings which develop in a

specific context. These understandings can then be

transferred to new contexts in other studies to provide a

framework with which to reflect on arrangements of meaning

and action that occur in these new contexts (Terre Blanche

& Derrheim, 1999, p. 63).

Dependability

    This is the alternative to reliability, in which the

researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in

the phenomenon chosen for the study. Dependability refers

to the degree to which the reader can be convinced that

the findings did indeed occur as the researcher says they

did. Dependability is achieved through rich and detailed

descriptions that show how certain actions and opinions

are rooted in, and develop out of, contextual interaction

(Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 64). In this study, I

will ground my interpretation of the text by linking it to

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passages from the original text and the context in which

interaction occurred.

Confirmability

This captures the traditional concept of objectivity.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that confirmability removes

the emphasis from the investigator (it is no longer his or

her objectivity that is at stake), and places it where it

ought more logically to be: on the data itself (p. 300).

The issue is no longer the investigator's characteristics,

but the characteristics of the data. Stiles (1993) states

that observations cannot be repeated exactly, no matter how

closely procedures are specified. Therefore, readers would

need the original material to confirm the interpretations.

To the extent that it is ethical and feasible, the data as

well as the process of gathering and interpreting it are

open to inspection (Stiles, 1993, p. 606).

Because in qualitative research the researcher is

personally involved in information collection and

interpretation, research bias tends to occur. Research bias

takes place when there is selective observation and

selective recording of information and also when one allows

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one's personal views and perspective to affect the way data is interpreted.

To deal with this issue of research bias, the researcher employs a strategy referred to as reflexivity, which means that the researcher is critically self-reflexive about her potential biases and predispositions (Burke, 2000). This involves discussing personal background and how this may affect the current study.

Ethical Issues

According to Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999), there are three ethical principles that have to be upheld in research: autonomy, nonmaleficence, and beneficence. The *autonomy* principle requires the researcher to respect the autonomy of all persons participating in the study. This includes being granted the voluntary and informed written consent of participants, ensuring the freedom of participants to withdraw from the study at any time, and respecting the participants' anonymity in any publication that might arise out of the study.

The principle of *nonmaleficence* means that the
research should do no harm to the research participants.
The researcher considered potential risks that the research
might inflict on the participants, be these social,
emotional or physical. This study could evoke painful
memories relating to the loss of the spouse; therefore, the
researcher was sensitive towards the feelings of the
participants.

Debriefing was done to create the space for the
participants to work through the experiences that were
evoked by the nature of the questions asked during the
study. Debriefing is one way of minimizing the harm that
may have occurred as a result of the study (Strydom, 2005).
I asked the participants how they felt after the interview
in order to find out how they were affected by the
interview. All four of the participants said that they
found that talking about their lost spouses helped them.
The three participants whose wives had been dead for six
months and less wanted to talk more about their loss and
they said they found it different to be talking to someone
who was not part of their family or friends.

The interview appeared to serve as a catharsis for the participants and it gave them the opportunity to release emotions and to discuss matters which troubled them, but which they could not ordinarily discuss with others. For instance, one of the fathers spoke at length about his frustrations with his step-son. None of the participants was in therapy at the time of the interview, and yet they said that they were starting to heal from the loss of their spouses.

The principle of _beneficence_ requires the researcher to design the research such that it will be of benefit, if not directly to the research participants, then more broadly to the other researchers or the society at large. This study aims to benefit society in that it will assist in creating new meanings of single parents in general, and single fathers in particular.

The next chapter introduces the participants and discusses the interviews. Emerging themes from each participant will be discussed and later a summary of the four participants' themes will be interrogated. Thereafter, reflections of the researcher concerning the process of the interviews will be offered.

CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEWS

Presentation of the interviews

Presented here are the four 'stories' of four single widowers, two Black and two White. The interviews were unstructured and focused on the experiences of widowers as single fathers. All interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed. Each participant received a copy of summaries of the transcripts and was asked to check my interpretation of the interviews to ensure accuracy.

A brief overview of our initial contact and my perception of the ambiance of the interview will be presented. I will then give an overview of the person, including some basic background information. The family genogram will be drawn to give more information about the family that is being discussed. This will be followed by a description of the actual interview, and the emerging themes will then be considered. After giving an individual presentation of the interviews, I will then give a

collective interpretation of the four interviews, linking

this with the literature review. A short description of

what genograms are follows:

GENOGRAMS

A genogram is a format for drawing a family tree that

records information about family members and their

relationships over at least three generations. Genograms

display family information graphically in a way that

provides a quick *gestalt* of complex family patterns and a

rich source of hypotheses as to how a clinical problem may

be connected to the family context and the evolution of

both problem and context over time (McGoldrick & Gerson,

1985, p. 1).

Multigenerational triangles are likely to develop if

one parent dies or leaves because of divorce or separation.

In this study, genograms will be used to illustrate any

changes in alliances that occurred after the death of the

spouse. One of the most common patterns takes place when a

single parent and her children share a household with their

parents (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985). The single parent may

lose power as the grandparents take over child-rearing

responsibilities, or as a grandparent-grandchild alliance forms against the parent (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985).

The physical, social, and emotional functioning of family members is profoundly interdependent, with changes in one part reverberating in other parts of the system. According to McGoldrick and Gerson (1985), the adaptive efforts of members of the system reverberate through many levels of the system … from the biological to the intrapsychic to the interpersonal; that is, from the nuclear and extended family, community, culture and beyond.

An introduction to Mr Mathe

Mr Mathe was recommended to me by the oncology social worker. The social worker made the initial contact with him. I telephoned Mr Mathe to introduce myself, and to explain further what the study was about. When I telephoned, he sounded distracted and it seemed as if he was driving as traffic sounds were audible. He said he was willing to take part in the study. We made the appointment for the interview. He wanted the interview to be done during office hours at his place of work. His secretary phoned me after three days to confirm the appointment.

MR MATHE'S GENOGRAM
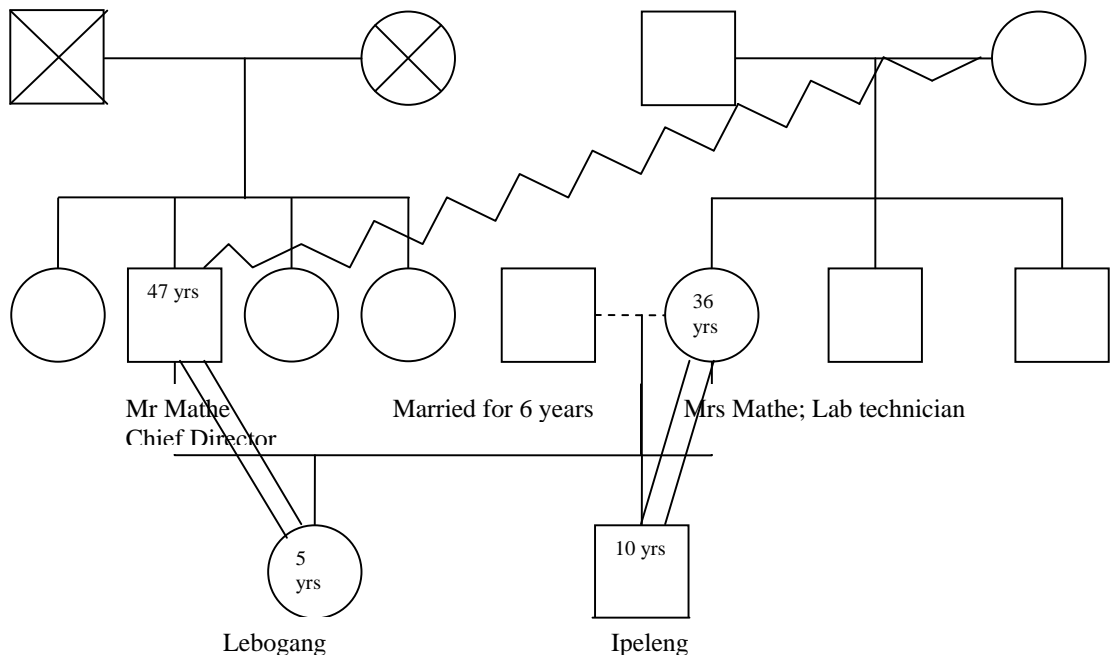
Figure 1: Before Mrs Mathe's death

47 yrs

Mr Mathe
Chief Director

Married for 6 years

36 yrs

Mrs Mathe; Lab technician

5 yrs

Lebogang

10 yrs

Ipeleng
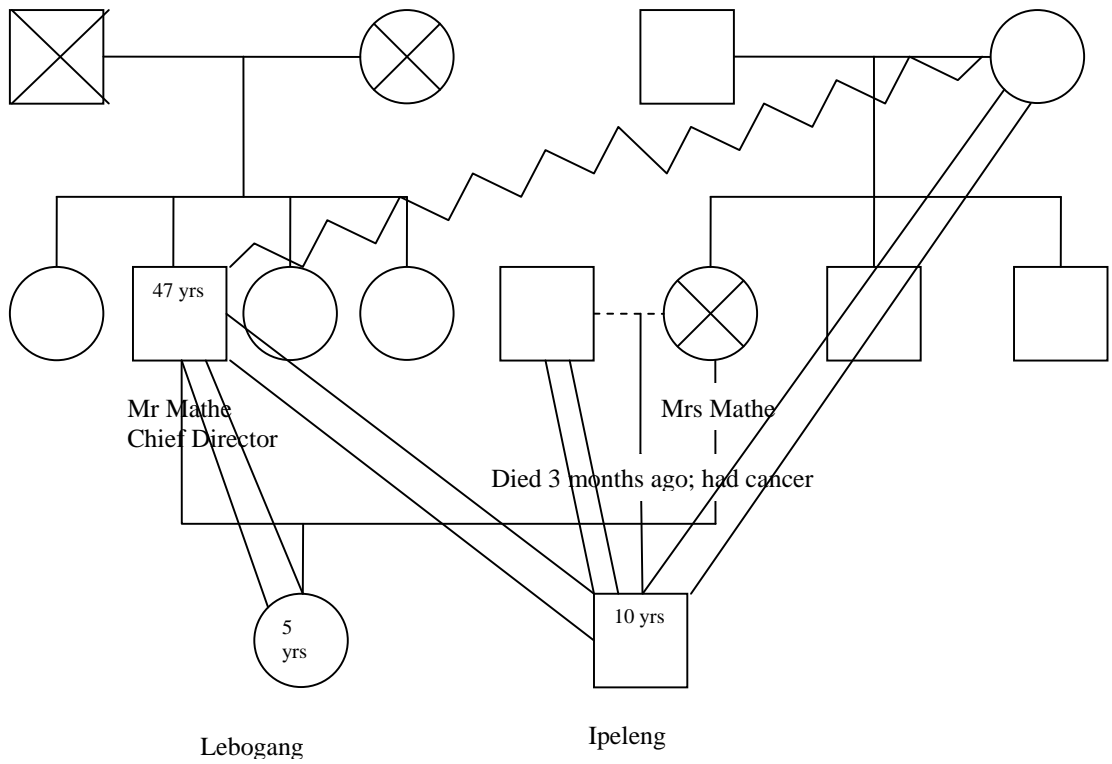
Figure 2: After Mrs Mathe's death

47 yrs

Mr Mathe
Chief Director

Mrs Mathe

Died 3 months ago; had cancer

5 yrs

Lebogang

10 yrs

Ipeleng

Background information

Mr Mathe is 47 years old and is a chief director
working for a military institution. He stays in the suburbs
of a big city with his two children, a five-year-old
daughter and a ten-year-old son. He is not the biological
father to his son; his late wife had a relationship with
another man before Mr Mathe met her and she and the other
man had a son together. Thabo, the son, was not officially
adopted by Mr Mathe, but he treats him and refers to him as
his son. Mrs Mathe died three months ago after a short
illness.

The interview

The interview took place at 14h40 and took about 70
minutes. The time that we agreed upon for the appointment
was shifted to a later time on the same day. When I arrived
at his office, he was out of the office busy with something
and I had to wait for him for about ten minutes. I felt
very awkward and nervous before the interview started.
Perhaps this was due to the fact that the environment was
very formal and intimidating. He led me into his huge
office.

We sat at a smaller table which seemed to be the one he used when interviewing or having meetings with clients. He introduced himself as Mr Mathe. He appeared to be uncomfortable before the interview started: I suppose, perhaps, that discomfort was due to my own state of discomfort. As soon as the interview started and I relaxed, he also appeared more comfortable. He spoke freely about his experiences and he kept on talking even after the audio tape was switched off at the end of the interview.

Themes emerging from Mr Mathe's interview

Control and helplessness

The theme of control is dominant throughout Mr Mathe's story. His type of work requires that he always be in control. He works in a military setting which is traditionally a very authoritative and controlling context. He occupies a high position in his work. He was the one who was always in control in his house when his wife was still alive and he controlled the relationship between his late wife and her family. When asked if his wife's family was closer to his nuclear family he said:

Yes, but her family … they tried to get closer with her but I always tried to say that our things are our things and our decisions, and she learned that.

It seems that he unilaterally decided how his family should be run, and that his wife did not have much choice but to agree to this. He was very disappointed and felt betrayed by his wife when she decided to have her mother around when she was dying. He felt that his mother-in-law did not belong there with his wife. He stated:

I felt that I was the one who was supposed to be there and not her mother because we were always together and the mother-in-law was not there. We have been married for five years, so for six years she was not in the picture.

Even when his wife was dying he still wanted to control the relationship between mother and daughter. The fact that his wife insisted on having her mother there all the time might have made him feel helpless. He is used to things working out his way, but now he finds himself having to play second fiddle to his mother-in-law.

He was very frustrated and felt helpless when his wife was ill and did not know what caused the illness. That was a very uncomfortable position for him as there was nothing he could do. They had to go home and wait for the doctor to contact them as soon as the doctor got the test results. He tried to maintain some sort of control over the wife's illness by looking for information on the internet regarding the type of cancer that his wife had and what other treatment options there were.

Mr Mathe's need for control is also seen in his relationship with the lady that helps with the household chores. It seems that since he was not able to control his wife's illness, he tries to over-compensate by making sure that the helper's health is under his scrutiny. He commented about his involvement in the helper's health status:

> I know that I am not a woman but if she has problems she must tell me and talk to me otherwise I will not know when she wants help. I always tell her that if you are a woman you must always do tests like HIV and some other 'women things'.

From the above comment it seems as if he holds himself
responsible for the helper's health. Perhaps he feels that
if he was vigilant enough he might have been able to
prevent what happened to his wife; the cancer might have
been diagnosed earlier and his wife might still be alive.

Mr Mathe's reluctance to seek help from the extended
family also appears to be his way of making sure that he is
in control of what is happening in his house. He perceives
help from others as threatening his control over his house
and children. He was disappointed when Mrs Mathe's family
said that they were sorting out the issue of his son with
the son's biological father. He felt that it was his duty
to sort it out himself and the grandparents had no right to
do that for him.

Not being in control may be perceived by Mr Mathe as a
sign of weakness. He is presently in a vulnerable position
regarding the custody court case with his late wife's son's
biological father. For Mr Mathe there are only challenges
in life and not problems, but it sounds as though he
realizes that the situation with the son may be a problem
since he has no control over what the outcome will be: the

court has the controlling and deciding power. The fact that his in-laws are supportive of the biological parent seems to make him more helpless regarding the custody of the son.

Maintaining the illusion that he is coping well with work and the children might be a manoeuvre to control how his employer perceives him. His employer thinks that he is coping well because his work is always up to date, but Mr Mathe knows that he is not coping. He goes back to work in the evenings to keep his work up to date. He says that one needs to keep up and there is no room for saying 'I am not coping'.

The interview set-up also confirmed Mr Mathe's apparent need to be in control. We met for the interview at his work place where he feels in control; I had to go through his secretary. He maintained the authoritative position right until the start of the interview. Perhaps that was due to the nature of the topic to be discussed. For someone in his position, to acknowledge to a stranger, who is a woman, that he is not coping must have been difficult.

Mr Mathe's relentless need for control is seen in his relationship with his acquaintances. His friends meet with him on his terms only. He says: "If someone wants to see me and spend time with me he must come to me". He realized that to make everything run smoothly in his life without the help of his wife he cannot afford not to be on top of things. He runs his life like a well oiled machine and he sets boundaries in terms of how he spends his time outside his nuclear family. For him, his children come first.

The controlling theme seems to have positive outcomes for this family. Control is used as a tool in adjusting to the single-parent status. For someone with a controlling interactional style, the way in which his wife died might have caused him discomfort. He then reacted to the discomfort in the only way he knows how, which involves even more control.

Aiming to be a 'perfect father and mother'

The theme of aiming to be a 'perfect father and mother' represents the enormous burden that Mr Mathe carries. He never allows himself to be wrong or perceived

as inadequate in his new role of single parenting. He tries
his utmost to be the best parent for his children even if
this is not practical. He claims to discuss every issue
with his children and he tries to involve them in decision
making. He has utopian ideas on how an ideal parent should
be and tries by all means to fit this profile. By doing so,
he is putting himself under a lot of pressure, as he does
not accept help from others since this might be construed
as a sign of not being a perfect parent. He feels that by
not doing what his late wife used to do in the house will
be a sign of not being 'perfect' in his new role.

Trying to be the perfect father and mother involves
adopting both his late wife's and his own role. His wife
did the cooking and never put the responsibility on the
helper regarding child-rearing duties. He is also doing the
same; he does not want the helper to cook for them because
that might mean that he is abdicating carrying out his late
wife's duties. He comments about his responsibility as a
parent to do everything for his family:

> I just want to say that a lot of men out there should
> take it upon themselves. Should this happen, they
> should be ready to take the fight to look after the

children. Not only the children, the house and look

after yourself … challenges will always come; I say

challenges because you can overcome those

challenges … but you don't step away from the

children; make sure you are always there for them.

From the above comment, there is no room in Mr Mathe's

mind for failing as a parent. He feels that as a parent you

should not strive simply to be the best you can: you should

try to be the ultimate parent. Much guilt is aroused when

he finds himself not being the perfect father and mother.

He says that he tends to be very harsh to the children and

wishes that he had someone who could teach and guide him.

He perceives himself as doing better than most parents

who are 'double'. As a perfect parent, Mr Mathe hopes for

perfect children: he says that his daughter will learn to

be independent and he is already teaching her to be

responsible. His discomfort seems to be with the son

because, unlike the daughter who is open and talks a lot

about her mother, the son is not talking. He says: "That

worries me; I think that later he may explode because he is

not talking". For the first time in the interview he

acknowledged the fact that he needs help. He said:

I and the kids are supposed to see a psychologist
about the loss ... Maybe a psychologist will help him
talk about his mother. You see I don't know if what I
am doing with the kids is ok because no one is telling
me that.

Mr Mathe seems to demonstrate a strong need to always
do the right thing. He wants to make the right decisions
and to ensure that he has control over how his family is
run.

Isolation

Mr Mathe seems to have built a wall around himself and
his nuclear family. His dislocation from his family of
origin over a long period appears to have contributed to
his isolation. Extended family members are perceived as
being interfering, rather than as being a support system
for him. He says that: "if you stay with extended family
members you now adopt other problems". Regarding his
extended family, he adds: "... family is not something that
is close to my heart; em ... I managed on myself".

The children are also taught by their father to isolate themselves from their grandparents. It appears as if the daughter is a good student so far because she never wants to visit her aunts or uncles, even if Mr Mathe goes away on business trips. Mr Mathe's isolation seems to be fuelled by his distrust of family. He seems to isolate himself as a way of protecting himself from his extended family. This comment demonstrates his feelings:

> ... you know traditionally our people, the African people, they always talk. So if you are close to this thing ... these are the people that will hurt you.

The isolation theme is linked to the theme of control. Mr Mathe's isolation seems to be a way of trying to maintain control in his life. If the extended family is excluded from his nuclear family, there will not be any threat to his control. He says:

> It is better to get someone who comes in, you pay them and they go. So if you are not happy they can go ... I cut the assistance from families from the day after the funeral.

It is safer for him to relate with people who do not
have familial bonds to him because then he can decide when
to terminate the bond. He says that family members can
never be shaken off once they become too close. He was very
close to his wife and everything was 'centralized' around
his wife, and he says that when she died everything 'went
back'. He found himself alone again. He is now trying to
keep his children for himself.

There is a disconnection from the extended family, but
a strong connection between him and the children. He spends
his days either at work or with the children. Mr Mathe does
not seem to have close friends with whom he connects.

Mr Mathe's response to the interview summaries

Mr Mathe said that the summaries were a true
reflection of what he said in the interview. He was
surprised to see how isolated his family is and stated that
he was aware of his distrust of others, but did not realize
the extent to which this was the case. It was painful to
see how he had denied his children the connection they
needed from outside his nuclear family. He says that he

thinks his children need to be with him so that he can protect them.

Researcher's reflections on the interview

Before the interview started I felt a bit intimidated by the interview setting; that is, his occupation, the place where the interview was taking place, the type of topic and the fact that he was the first participant that I interviewed for this study. I think I was most uncomfortable about the fact that he lost his wife three months ago and felt that unlike in a therapeutic context where clients decide to speak to the therapist about their lost loved ones, I chose him to speak to me. Although he voluntarily took part in the study, I could not help feeling that I had no right asking him about his widowed experiences, especially so soon after his wife died.

I left the interview feeling sad and sorry for Mr Mathe. He seemed to try too hard to protect himself from everyone and I wondered what it was about himself that he was protecting. I also left the interview session feeling just how society generalizes the Ubuntu concept, which means that I am because you are, as being something that

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all Blacks share. Society tends to assume that Black people are less isolated than Whites. Mr Mathe seemed so alone at a time when he could have benefited so much from people around him. I understand that at the time the isolation to which Mr Mathe was exposing himself and his family was serving a function. For him being alone means being able to control what is happening around him. Perhaps that also means that if he is away from people that care about him they will not see how much he is hurting.

An introduction to Marko

Marko was recommended to me by the oncology social worker. She made the initial telephone contact. She said to me that Marko was very eager to be part of this study. I telephoned Marko to introduce myself and explain the nature of the study. The telephone conversation was very awkward as it seemed as if Marko did not understand or hear well what I was saying. The initial conversation was in English and it seemed as if Marko found it difficult to respond. I thought that perhaps this was due to the fact that he felt uncomfortable speaking English because he had a very strong Afrikaans accent; perhaps he struggled to express himself. I started speaking Afrikaans to him and the conversation

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was better. Marko said that he was willing to take part in
the study. He said that he would be comfortable to have the
interview done at his house. The appointment was made for
the next week at his house after work, which was around
17h30.

MARKO VOSLOO'S GENOGRAM
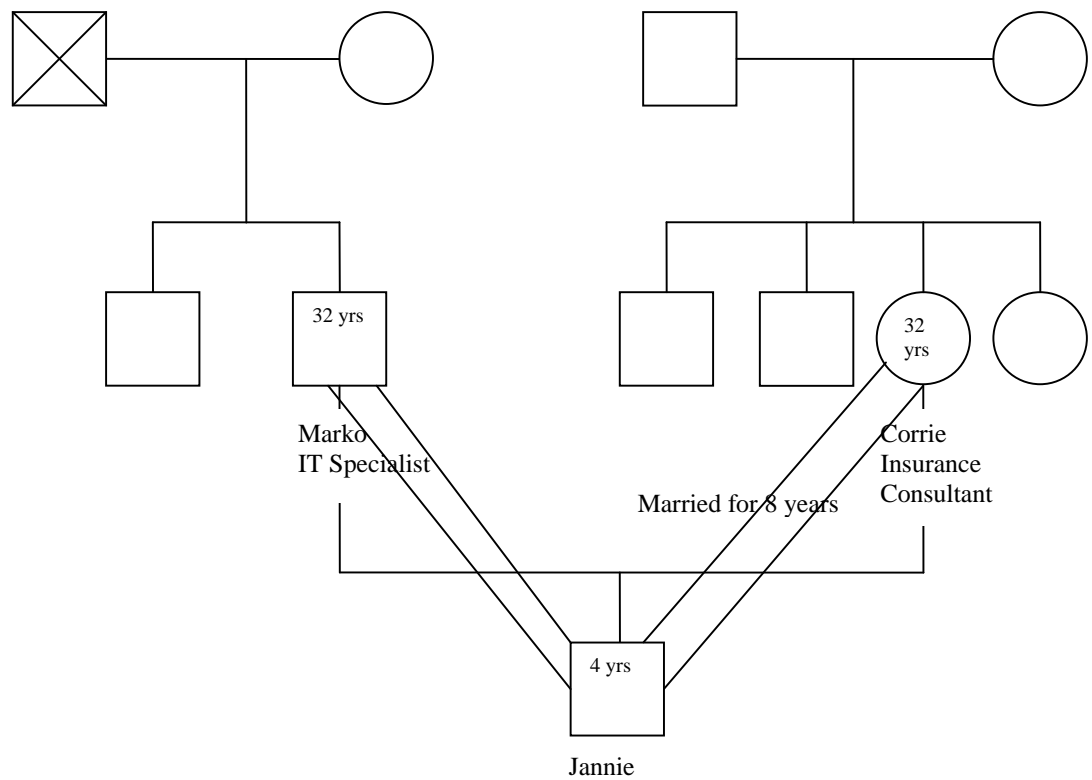
Figure 3: Before Corrie's death
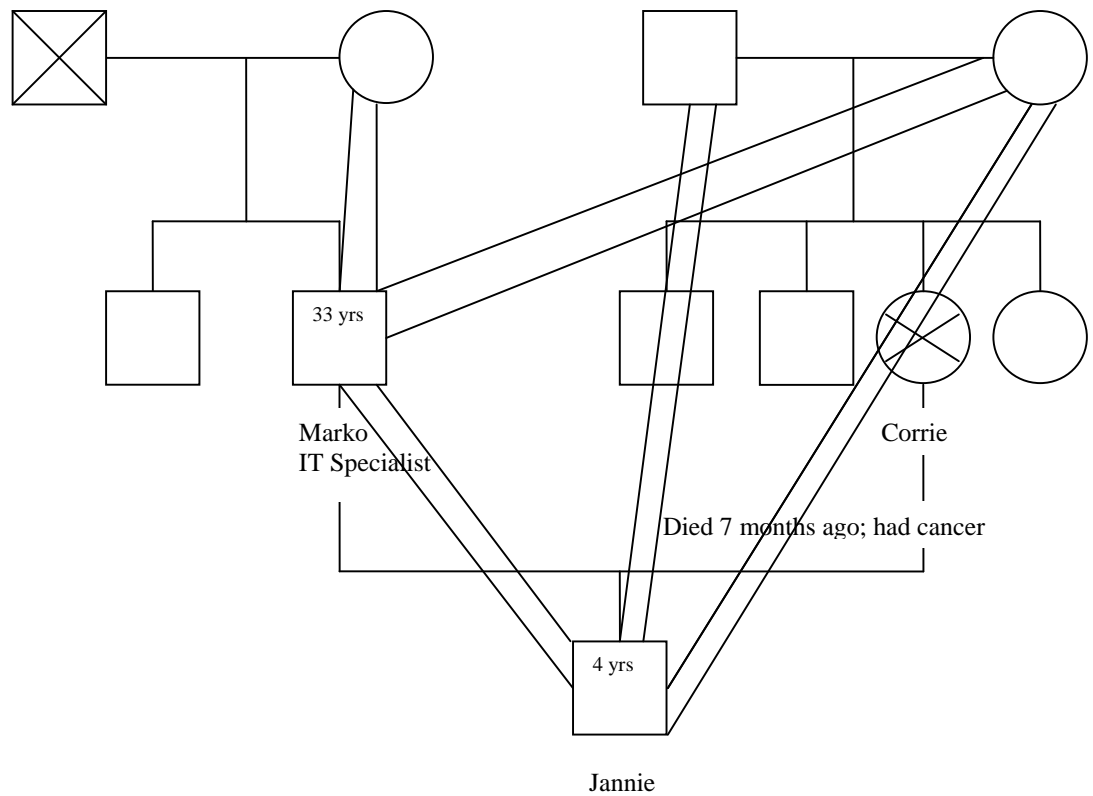
Figure 4: After Corrie's death

Background information

Marko Vosloo is a thirty-three years old White widower whose wife died six-and-a-half months ago. He stays in a townhouse complex with his mother and his son, Jannie, who is 4 years of age. He met his wife at university and they were married for nine years. Marko's wife died of cancer. She was sick for three-and-a-half years. His wife, Corrie, was diagnosed with cancer when their son was seven months

old. Marko is the younger of two sons. His mother is presently staying with him and his son. Marko works for an information technology company as an IT (information technology) specialist.

The Interview

The interview took place at his house in the late afternoon at 17h45. When I arrived, he and his son came out to the driveway to welcome me to their house. The son was relaxed and he started telling me how his day was at the crèche. Marko was responding warmly to the son. Marko made me feel comfortable from the beginning, and my anxiety about the interview was immediately dispelled. The house was very welcoming and felt homely. His mother was in the kitchen and it seemed like she was preparing dinner. As we were sitting in the lounge, Marko's mother asked Jannie, Marko's son, to come with her so that Daddy could talk with me. We sat on the same couch and the audio-tape was placed between us.

The interview lasted for 65 minutes. Marko's mother offered us drinks in the middle of the interview. The conversation with Marko was very relaxed and there were

several instances where there was a lot of laughing. Even though Marko was very calm when narrating his story about Corrie, there were times when there was so much sadness in his voice. He would speak softer and the pain was so tangible. He would then start to lighten up and the conversation became less serious. The change in his mood seemed to be showing the process he is going through at the moment; he is at times sad when he thinks of Corrie, but then he realizes that life must go on and he must be strong for the sake of Jannie.

Themes emerging from Marko's interview

Responsibility

This theme was evident throughout the text where Marko was talking about his new role. He says that the most difficult challenge as a single parent was his awareness of the responsibility that faced him. He feels responsible towards Jannie because he believes that it is important that his son gets the best so that he becomes the best child. Therefore, he feels that if Jannie is to be the best child, then he has to be a model father. Marko derives

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satisfaction from the knowledge that Jannie is perceived by others as well-behaved. He says:

> … dan voel ek goed. Jy weet as hy iets doen wat goed is dan voel jy … I am doing something right.

That responsibility of being the best parent induces some anxiety in Marko. He worries that he is perhaps too harsh at times. He says sometimes he wonders if he is doing the right thing. He remarks: "Bederf ek hom nou; jy weet jy worry nou die hele tyd". It appears as if it is important for him that Jannie turns out to be a well-behaved child.

Regardless of his mother being there to help him, Marko took his new role seriously. He knew that it was his responsibility, not his mother's, to make sure that Jannie was taken care of. He says that everyone is really helping, but he remains responsible. It was difficult to adjust to the new responsibility in the first few months. He states:

> ... die paar maande na Corrie dood is, veral onmiddelik na die dood het ek partykeer opgestaan en gedink. I don't know how I am going to do this ... it

was n baie confusing tyd gewees, veral die eerste drie
maande...

Marko missed the shared responsibility he had with
Corrie. He says that people marry for a reason which for
him means to help each other with parenting duties. He was
involved in caring for Jannie while Corrie was alive, as
most of the time she was very weak, especially after she
had chemotherapy; but still the fact that Corrie was not
there to give him emotional support was difficult. This
lone parenting is still strange to him. He says that if he
knew that Corrie would get cancer they would not have had a
child.

Marko also feels that he needs to make the loss of
Corrie less painful for the others. He did not want to
burden his in-laws with the responsibility of helping him
arrange the funeral. His father-in-law is a church
minister; therefore, he could have helped him or given him
advice on funeral arrangements, but he felt that it was his
responsibility to do this. He says:

... it was horrible om die diens te reël. Ek het nie
geweet hoe nie ... ek kan nie vir hulle vra om te help

nie ... hulle kind is dood.

Marko's need to be a responsible parent poses some
conflict in maintaining the balance between being someone
who gives Jannie love and someone who maintains discipline.
He says:

> … elke kind het n ouer nodig wat sagter is en n ouer
> was meer harder is. Een hou die discipline en die
> ander een gee die liefde en drukkies. Nou besef ek nou
> maar … ek moet die discipline gee en steeds die selfde
> kant ma wees.

Marko finds it difficult to maintain that balance
between being a giver of love and the one who maintains
discipline. He wants to give Jannie 'liefde en drukkies',
but on the other hand he does not want him to be spoilt. He
prides himself on being someone who has done good work in
parenting Jannie so far. He says about Jannie's good
manners:

> Dit is die belangrikste ding vir my op die
> oomblik; dis baie rewarding as hy sulke goed doen
> of iemand dit agterkom en sê.

Marko pointed out that the most difficult part of single parenting is maintaining the balance between discipline and love. For someone like Marko who feels responsible for his child's well being, being unable to maintain the balance between giving love and maintaining discipline is stressful.

Keeping things the same

Marko strives to keep things as they were when Corrie was alive. This seems to be evident in how he is raising Jannie. He says that he feels that things should stay the same so that Jannie is not confused. I get the idea that the need to keep things the same is not only beneficial for Jannie, but also helps Marko to cope with his new role.

Marko's need for constancy in parenting for Jannie does not leave much room for faults. It is very important for him that the rules that they (he and Corrie) decided on are followed. Sticking to the rules that were set by both him and Corrie makes the loss of his wife less obvious and perhaps that is his way of making peace with Corrie's death. His insistence on constancy in the rules and

routines helps Marko cope with his new role. For this family keeping things the same is essential in the maintenance of homeostasis in their family system. Marko's commentary on the importance of constancy in Jannie's life is:

> Toe Corrie nog geleef het toe het ons gesê hier is die reëls. Daar is mos rede hoekom daar reëls is, en daar die reëls staan nog. Hy weet die enigste ding wat verander het is dat mamma nie hier meer nie. Maar die wêreld is nog dieselfde, my reëls is nog dieselfde en my pa is nog dieselfde. Ek wil graag hê hy moet my sien soos voor mamma dood is … Hy moet sien dat eintlik pa is nog dieselfde. Well ek stress met tye want dis nie maklik nie.

Even in the midst of Marko's striving for sameness in his relationship with Jannie, there are changes that have been adopted. Marko and Jannie have developed this ritual where he tells his son about mommy. Almost every night after Bible reading and praying, the two narrate to each other stories about Corrie. Marko says he thinks that Jannie is scared that he might forget his mother. It seems that in telling the story to Jannie he is not only keeping

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the memory of Corrie alive for Jannie, but also for
himself. The special time spent with Jannie every evening
evokes happy memories of Corrie for Marko. He was smiling
when he told me how he would tell Jannie about the things
that Corrie liked.

Family routines and rituals are those behaviours and
practices adopted and maintained by families to orient and
organize family life into predictable patterns of living
(McCubbin in Moriarty & Wagner, 2004, p. 195). Moriarty and
Wagner (2004) add that the importance that families attach
to these practices promotes family unity and stability.

Connectedness and isolation

The theme of connectedness is evident in the way Marko
relates to his extended family and his in-laws. The way
Marko and the researcher connected served as a sample of
how he reaches out to people and how effortless it is for
people to want to connect with him. There is no sense of
desperation or helplessness in the way he connects with
people. He acknowledges the mutual function of connecting.
His connection with friends and family is not only useful
for his healing, but also for those who loved and were

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closer to Corrie. The following statement illustrates how connecting with others is perceived by Marko as mutually beneficial:

> As iemand aanbied om vir jou iets te doen, gebruik dit.Dit help nie net vir jou maar ook vir daardie mense wat voel hulle het iets prakties gedoen. Onthou hull gaan ook deur die proses.

Marko's connection with his friends is also a source of isolation. He still gets invitations to dinner from his friends, but he feels isolated from them in the sense that the connection he had with them was lost when Corrie died. He now connects with his friends on a different level, that is, as a single father and not as a couple with Corrie. He says that being in the company of his friends without Corrie feels uncomfortable. Some of his friends do not know how to relate to him when they are with their wives. He comments:

> Gewoonlik het jy saam met n sekere klomp gesit en kuier en Corrie het saam met n ander klomp gesit en kuier. Julle het darem almal gesit en praat, nou voel jy jy moet met hierdie klomp praat en dan met daardie

klomp praat. Jy is so half … as hulle praat oor wat n

man en vrou … wat hulle doen … of wat ever, dan begin

ek aan Corrie dink. Dan voel jy nie lekker.

Marko's response to the interview summaries

Marko made one editorial correction, I wrote 'she'

instead of 'he'. He said that otherwise the summary

represented what he said in the interview. He also

corrected the paragraph where I said that Corrie was in and

out of hospital for chemotherapy. He said that she went to

hospital due to complications from chemotherapy.

Researcher's reflections on the interview

Interviewing Marko was comfortable and it almost felt

as though I had known him for a long time. I expected Marko

to be aloof because when I phoned to make the appointment

he seemed distant. I thought that he would feel

uncomfortable to tell a stranger about his struggles as a

single parent. Perhaps that was due to the fact that the

setting was so homely. We sat in the lounge area and I

could smell the food cooking in the kitchen. We sat on the

same sofa with the audiotape between us. The seating

arrangement possibly made the interview seem more like a friendly chat.

Marko is a perceptive, gentle man. My use of the word 'gentle' does not imply any lack of strength, but indicates a quality of humble, quite strength and sensitivity to his fellow human beings. He feels comfortable with every aspect of parenting, and although the single parent role is not without costs, he feels confident in his ability to deal with it.

Introduction to Matt

Matt was also recommended to me by the oncology social worker. I telephoned Matt to introduce myself and the topic. He said that he was willing to take part in the study. We made arrangements for the interview. He said that he would be comfortable to have the interview at his house. The interview could not be in the afternoon or evenings as that time was his time with his daughter. We agreed on having the interview at 13h00.

MATT HENNING'S GENOGRAM
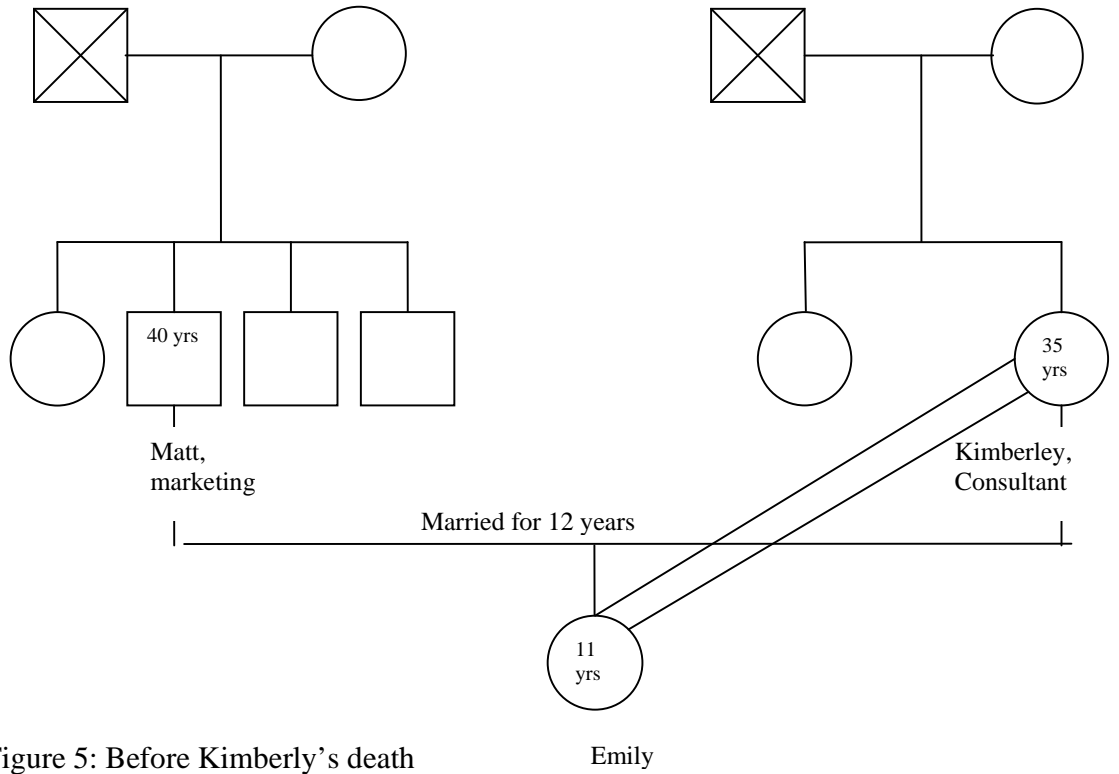
Figure 5: Before Kimberly's death
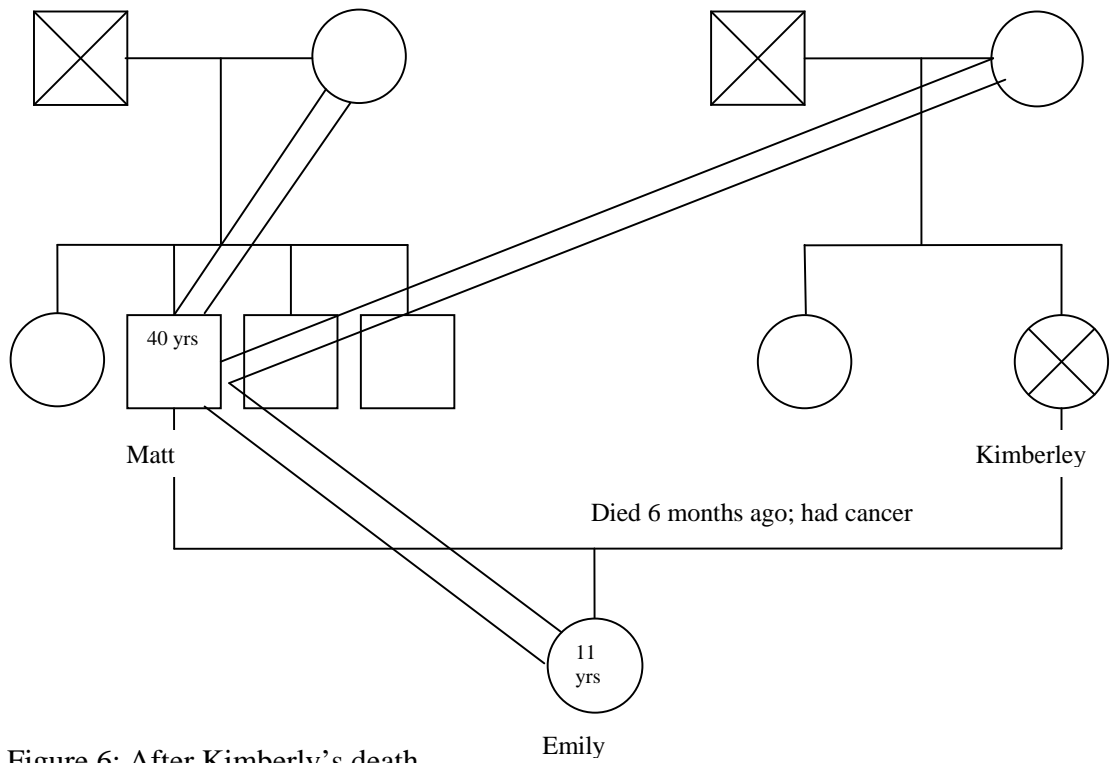
Figure 6: After Kimberly's death

Background information

Matt Henning is a 40-year-old White father of a 10-year-old daughter, Emily. Emily will turn 11 the day after the interview with Matt. He stays in a townhouse complex situated in an affluent part of the city. He is renting the house and is planning to buy it soon. His wife, Kim, died six months ago from leukaemia. She was diagnosed with leukaemia 21 months before she died. Kim was successful in her work and earned a good salary. He works for a marketing company and spends a lot of time travelling.

The interview

The interview took place at his home at 13h00 and took 50 minutes. He came out to show me where to park the car. He was warm and welcoming and he asked me what language I preferred to speak. I told him that speaking English was easier but that I did not mind speaking Afrikaans. He has an Afrikaans surname but he is English-speaking. He was relieved to discover that we would be talking English. When I made the appointment, I spoke with him Afrikaans as I assumed that he was Afrikaans-speaking.

He was alone at home and he offered me something to drink. In the kitchen there was washing hanging on a washing drier. The house was clean and had a masculine touch to it. We went upstairs and sat in the lounge for the interview. The audiotape was placed on the table and we sat facing each other on separate couches.

Matt and I were relaxed during the interview. Talking about Kim seemed to be all right and he was not embarrassed to tell me about his difficulties of single parenting. The interview seemed to continue after the audiotape was switched off. He was concerned about the next day because it was Emily's birthday. He was not sure how it was going to be for the two of them since it would be her first birthday without her mother.

Themes emerging from Matt's interview

Helplessness

This theme refers to Matt's need to be 'cuddled' and rescued by significant others in his life. He seems to be struggling to cope on his own and tends not to trust himself as a single parent. He was doing the parenting

alone before his wife died but now feels inadequate to do so. The following comment reveals how he feels about the new role of single parenting:

> Throughout the 21-month period that she had the disease here were days that I had to be a single parent because she was in hospital for great lengths of time, sometimes for a month and sometimes for two weeks depending on the treatment. So it did not hit me on the day she died; it did not take me by surprise …

The feeling of inadequacy may be as a result of him still feeling so lost and alone without Kim. He says he is not the type of person who survives on his own. The feeling of inadequacy he has about himself makes him lose sight of the fact that he has resources within himself to perform well as a single father. Perhaps the strong sense of helplessness that is evident in Matt's story is mostly related to the mourning process.

Matt gets a lot of empathy from his mother since she went through the same thing as he did. Matt's father died when he was the same age as his daughter so there may be some sort of transference from the mother. This fear from

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the mother that Matt might struggle with lone parenting may
be causing 'single parent anxiety', which immobilizes him.
He acknowledges the fact that he needs to do parenting on
his own.

Matt has some ambivalence towards the help that he is
getting. He is overwhelmed by all the responsibilities of
lone parenting, but on the other hand he says that he needs
to be a parent to Emily alone. The ambivalence gives one
the impression that he is saying: "help me I can't do it
alone" and in the same breath he is saying: "don't help me
I can do it alone".

Isolation versus support

Matt seems to find himself continuously caught between
feeling isolated and feeling supported. His family of
origin and his mother-in-law have been very supportive. His
employer also understands his situation and allows him to
go home earlier so that he is at home when Emily comes home
from school. The church also plays a very important role at
this time because he always knows that he could just ask
anyone if he needs help. On the other hand, Matt feels
isolated from his circle of friends. He says that it is

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very difficult to go to functions because it is only him
there. This feeling of isolation is echoed in this
statement:

> Everyone else is there with their husbands and wives;
> I feel like a spare wheel in this picture and it is
> difficult …

Matt's family support also stirs up feelings of
isolation. The social gatherings and holidays spent
together with the family makes the absence of Kim so
noticeable. He seems to appreciate their support, but he
cannot help feeling isolated in a supportive environment.
It seems that it is usually when he is with friends and
family that he realizes that Kim is really gone and he is
alone. He says:

> It feels so different than when my wife was there. I
> feel very lonely. We used to camp and that sort of
> thing; we are going to a camp in a few weeks time. It
> is going to be difficult because my wife is not there.

On the other hand, Matt feels that being around family may
help:

… it is going to be our first Christmas alone this
year but we will have my mother, my mother-in-law, my
sister-in-law and others. So we will be together; I
hope that makes things easier.

Time available versus time needed

Matt feels that there is not enough time to do
everything since Kim died. These extra demands on his time
and energy keep the dual role 'balancing act' in the
forefront of his consciousness. He is constantly aware of
his daughter's needs and the demands of his work. He
comments:

… I am a lot busier because I had to work and come
home and take care of my daughter.

He added:

… I can't do it because there is so much to do at
night … I don't have the time …

In terms of him not having time for himself he says:

I don't have time for myself anymore like I had
before. Weekends I don't go relax with my friends like
I used to, which is bad because there is always
something to do. For instance, I would be sitting and
watching TV and my daughter will come and ask me to
help with something. You don't really get time to
relax as much as you would like to.

Emily takes first preference in Matt's life, but his work
often requires the most of his time. He remarks:

… sometimes I have to go away for three to four times
a month … like next week, I have to go Knysna for two
weeks.

Although Matt finds it difficult to balance the two
roles, he is adjusting his lifestyle to accommodate the
additional parental demands. He acknowledges the fact he
needs help with babysitting Emily when he goes away on
business trips, but does not want his mother or mother-in-
law to take over his parenting role. He remarks:

> … me and my daughter have to learn to cope on our own.
> I can't lean on her forever.

Matt further states:

> I believe that my daughter and I need to carry on our
> own. We are a family now … I have to sit with my
> daughter and help her with homework, and that has been
> a challenge.

Time is a precious commodity for Matt and there seems
not to be enough of it. The challenge for him is to balance
time spent with Emily with time for himself. The cliché
that goes, 'so much to do and so little time' seems to be
true for Matt. When arranging for this interview, he made
it clear to me that I could only see him during school time
as after school time is Emily's time. This shows how Matt
has learnt to manage his time; he has time for Emily and
time for other things.

Matt's response to the interview summaries

Matt said that the summaries were a true reflection of
what he said in the interview. He was surprised at how
accurate I was in identifying his helplessness at the time
of the interview. He said he was feeling really low at the
time and the fact that Emily was about to celebrate her
first birthday without her mother was stressing him.

Researcher's reflections on the interview

When I left the interview session I felt like I wanted to
hold Matt in my arms as I would a little boy who dropped
his ice cream and tell him 'you will be OK'. He is big in
stature and confident-looking, but his vulnerability was
overwhelming.

Introduction to Mandla

Mandla was recommended to me by a friend. My friend
made the initial contact. I telephoned to explain what the
study was about and to schedule time for the interview if
he was willing to take part in the study. He said that he

was very busy at the moment with work-related issues but he
would call me back to tell me which day was suitable for
him to conduct the interview. He telephoned after two weeks
and the interview was scheduled for the following week.

MANDLA SITHOLE'S GENOGRAM

43 yrs

Mandla, manager

33 yrs

Thato, shop
assistant

Married for 10 years

19 yrs

16 yrs

10 yrs

Thabo

Bontle

Sipho
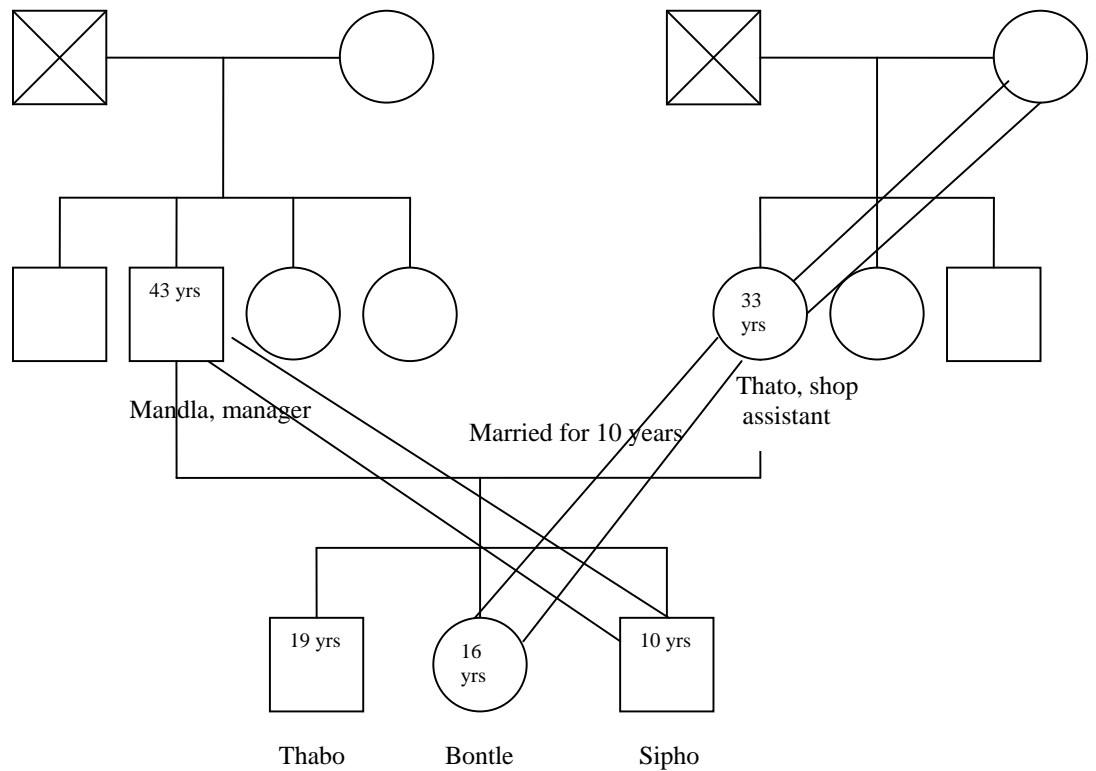
Figure 7: Before Thato's death

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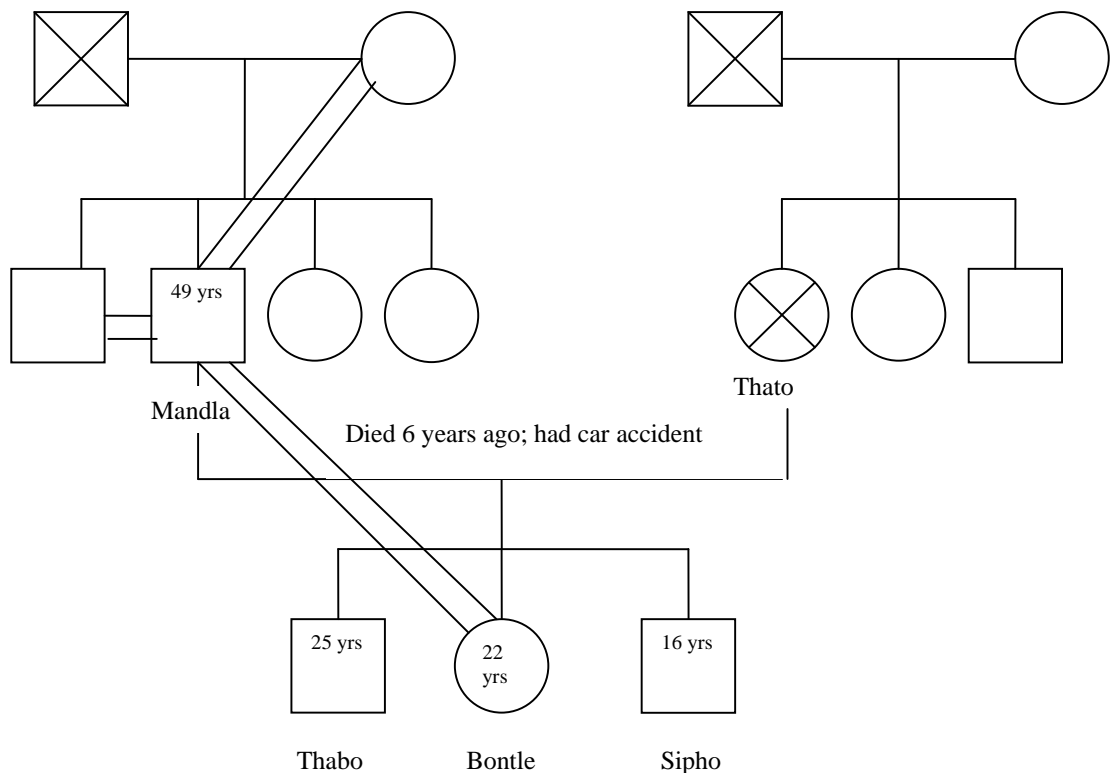
Figure 8: After Thato's death

Background information

Mandla Sithole is a 49-year-old Black widowed father of three children. The first-born is a son who is now 25 years old, followed by a daughter of 22 years the last child being a son of 16 years old. His wife died in 2000, aged 33 years old. She died in an automobile accident. He was also in the car together with two of his children. The wife died in hospital, and he was in an intensive care unit

for two weeks. He stays with his children in the suburbs of a neighbouring city. The elder son now works and the two other children are still at school.

The interview

The interview took place at 13h00 and took about 60 minutes. The interview was conducted in a coffee shop in the city where the interviewer lives. He stays in another city and he insisted on driving through to Pretoria as he did not want me to drive far and was also worried that I might get lost in an unfamiliar place. He chose the place and said that he would be comfortable, assuring me that he would be happy with the interview being conducted in such a public place. I met him at the door of the coffee house and we went inside. Initially, it was a struggle to get a table which was secluded and less noisy. Once we sat down and I reintroduced myself and the topic, we forgot about the setting. He did not seem to be disturbed by the fact that there were waitresses walking past our table. The interview seemed more like a conversation with someone over coffee. He was relaxed from the beginning and that dispelled my worries about the place in which we were having the interview.

Themes emerging from Mandla's interview

Disbelief

Throughout Mandla's story, the theme of disbelief is prominent. The circumstances leading to the death of his wife made him not believe that she had died. He was with her in the car, and to accept that she had died was difficult for Mandla to accept. Even after six years he still does not believe that his wife has died. One would expect this feeling of disbelief to have subsided due to the period of mourning, but it is still very strong. That seems to be what is keeping this family 'alive'. It allows them to continue with life as before.

It seems as if the extended family, especially Mandla's wife's family also do not believe that their daughter had died. They still hope to see her when Mandla and the children come to visit.

Mandla seems not to grasp how good a parent he has been for his children since the death of his wife. He finds it difficult to articulate his successes as a single

parent. He does not want to take credit for the way his children have turned out. When asked how he rates himself as a parent, he says:

> I was lucky to have such good children and I want to
> thank God also in helping me raise such good children.

Mandla knows that he is the one who actually put energy and sacrifices into his children's upbringing, but he thinks that it is his late wife and God who are partially responsible for his children's parenting. He says:

> I think I did a good job, I can say that I made a
> success of … like I succeeded. Like if I did not
> succeed maybe one of my kids will be a delinquent.

Mandla believes that it is his wife who helps him with decisions that have to be taken in the house, especially where child-raising issues are concerned. He does not believe that he has raised his children for six years on his own. He states:

> Sometimes when I don't know what to do with the kids,

I would go to our bedroom and ask her for help.

Protection

The theme of protection is encountered in situations
where Mandla's nuclear family is confronted with the
reality of the loss of mother and wife. His children wanted
to protect their father from the time he was still in
hospital. The older son, who was 19 years old at the time
of his mother's death, wanted his father to marry someone
who came to visit him in the hospital, in the hope of
protecting his father from the pain associated with his
mother's death.

Mandla's description of his relationship with his late
wife implies that they were inseparable; therefore, the son
feels that his father will be lost without their mother. It
seems as if the son has put aside his own pain and loss of
his mother and is focusing on his father's welfare. The
first few months after their mother's death, the children
wanted to make sure that their father was taken care of.
Mandla was still on sick leave recuperating from the
injuries sustained in the accident. He comments:

There were times when they did not even go out to play

with friends, they just stayed home with me … at the

time when my operation was not healed yet, they were

always around to help me.

The above comment shows how protective the children

were of the father. At that time their aunt was around to

help their father so they did not have to hang around him

all the time, but they did. Their good behaviour is also an

attempt from the children to protect their father. They did

not want their father to stress about them. He says:

To be honest with you, my children never gave me any

problems. They missed their mother at times but

because I was there it was not a problem …

He added that:

They are obedient and so on and they are such good

children. I was lucky to have such good children…

Mandla was also protected by his brother. His brother

took him to his (brother's) house after he was discharged

from hospital and he always tried to make sure that Mandla

is protected from loneliness and pain by taking him to meet his friends. Mandla says:

> And my brother was always there when I needed him, always there. He would come and fetch me from my house so that I can relax with some of his friends, ja, I would go and spend time with them; he would later take me back home.

Mandla and his two younger children were with his late wife in the car when she died; therefore, by keeping her 'alive' in his mind he is protecting himself from 'survivor guilt'. Perhaps he feels that he is to blame for the wife's death. If he keeps her alive that means that he is not guilty or responsible for her death as she is not dead.

The theme of protection is also seen in the relationship of Mandla and his extended family and in-laws. He tries not to go to family gatherings because he does not like seeing them uncomfortable due to the fact that his wife is not there with him and the children. He says:

> Going to family gatherings or parties alone is

difficult and painful. It is not easy and sometimes you find that when we get out of the car without her brings back all those painful memories. Even the way the extended family members look at us you can see that they feel sorry for us. It is like they feel very uncomfortable and don't know how to deal with us. So most of the time I don't even want to go to places which remind me and other people of my wife. I feel very uncomfortable.

This protectiveness for himself and others makes it impossible for him to connect with people who loved his wife, especially his late wife's mother and siblings. The comment below explains how painful it is for him to see the hurt in his in-laws' eyes when they see him and his children:

You see the hurt when they see me and the children only. It reminds them of their child. Sometimes some of them cry when they see us.

Mandla's nuclear family members seem to be very protective of each other. Since the death of the mother and wife they seem to always be together. From the Black

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cultural perspective, children usually visit their

grandparents or aunts during school holidays, but Mandla's

children never visited on their own; their father was

always with them and they never slept over. One gets the

impression that by not sleeping over the children want to

make sure that their father is fine. His refusal to allow

them to sleep over is also his way of making sure that his

children are all right.

Closeness and distance

Mandla says that being a single father has drawn him

closer to the children. His children were closer to the

mother than they were to him, and now he feels that he has

the privilege to get to know his children better. He

states:

> … you see and they also connect differently with you.
>
> They also learn to know what you like and what you
>
> don't … I also spend a lot of time at home … I also
>
> made sure that I bought all of them cell phones so
>
> that I can be able to contact them. Even when they are
>
> playing outside the house I can contact them when I
>
> need them specially if I am not home I can tell them

if I got delayed so that they know where I am and so.

This theme is closely linked to the theme of protection. The above comments show the link between the two themes. Mandla's brother is protecting him by being closer to him all the time. His mother also stayed with him for some time after the death of his wife and she kept on visiting Mandla and his children for the first year after the death to make sure that Mandla was coping well with the loss of his wife.

Mandla feels that he needs to know where his children are all the time and the same applies to him; he wants the children to know all the time where he is and when he will be coming home. He also says that being close to one's children allows one to know when there is something wrong. He states:

> You know by being close to your kids you know what your kids like and what they don't. Sometimes you find that there is an atmosphere at home between the kids and you are able to notice that. You are able to find out what is bothering them and they say 'so and so did not do her dishes or so and so did that to me'.

The theme of closeness is seen in Mandla's present 'relationship' with his late wife. He goes about life as if she is still alive. He wants to maintain that close relationship even in her death. As far as Mandla is concerned, his wife is still alive and she is involved in their everyday decisions. Cognitively, Mandla knows that his wife is dead, but his heart is telling a different story. When I said to him that I get the sense that his wife's presence is still strong in his life he replied:

> Yes, my wife is still there in the house. When I get inside the house I know and I can feel that she is there. Even though she is dead I don't think that she ever left us. Sometimes when I don't know what to do with the kids, I would go to our bedroom and ask her to help me.

Mandla's relationship with his partner seems to be both close and distant. He says that his partner understands that he is still 'married' to his dead wife. It seems as if they are having an adulterous relationship, as Mandla is still 'married'. He still refers to his bedroom as 'our bedroom'. It appears to me that Mandla has defined

the relationship with his partner as close, but not too
close, as his late wife still occupies her position as his
wife.

The relationship between Mandla and his daughter is
closer than it is with his sons. Their closeness makes it
easier for him and the daughter to bridge the sex-role
model stereotype. He connects with his daughter on many
levels; they are able to talk about almost anything. He
says that his daughter is free with him. They discuss
things that she would have discussed with her mother if she
was still alive; she also asks him to buy her things that
women need like panties and sanitary towels. Their
closeness is made more intense by their shared need to talk
about her mother. The two boys have moved onto another
level in their relationship with their late mother; they
seem not to depend on her for advice, while Mandla and his
daughter still do.

Mandla's response to the interview summaries

Mandla said that the summaries were a true reflection
of what he said during the interview. He says his daughter

was surprised to see how they have kept their mother alive
for all these years.

SUMMARIES OF THE FOUR INTERVIEWS

Each widowed single father represented in this study
is uniquely different, yet there are threads of commonality
underlying their situation. As the four widowers described
their experiences as single parents, commonalities and
unconventional behaviours were noted in their integration
of work and family responsibilities.

The following themes dominated and were prominent
throughout all the participants' interviews.

Adjustment to loss and loneliness

Three widowers lost their wives to cancer; the fourth
widower's wife died in a car accident. The circumstances
leading to the death of the wife seem to have an effect on
how the widowers adjusted to the loss. To the extent that
there is time for appropriate preparation, one tends to
experience relatively less of an assault on one's ability

to cope than when the death is totally unexpected (Rando, 1988, p. 52). Marko seems to have made peace with the idea that Corrie might not live long. He says that talking to Corrie about the possibility that she might die helped in the adjustment after her death. He feels very privileged in the sense that the illness gave him a chance to talk to her about her death. The loss and adjustments after the passing of his spouse were made a little less painful by the fact that he could plan his life without her before she died.

Matt also felt that knowing that Kim had cancer helped in the adjustment. They never thought that she would die so soon and Kim did not like talking about her dying, but she prepared Emily in terms of women and girl issues. Even though Matt's mother and sister help him, when it comes to questions around women he feels that Kim contributed a lot. That made life very easy for Emily and Matt. Rando (1988) claims that unless the widower had time to anticipate and rehearse new roles because of the length of the spouse's illness, he may have many new tasks to learn as he attempts to get used to life without his companion.

Mr Mathe's wife died after four weeks of being diagnosed with cancer. There was no time for this family to

come to terms with the idea that Mrs Mathe would not be around for long. Mr Mathe, whose wife has been dead for three months, struggles to come to terms with the loss of his wife. Weizman and Kamm (1987) state that when the loss has been sudden, it takes longer to recover. Mr Mathe also seems to struggle in defining himself as a person without his wife because she was a significant part of him. His life revolved around his wife and he comments: "… I centralized everything around the … me and my wife. Suddenly everything went back". Robertson and Utterback (1986, p. 209) assert that if personal identity has been closely linked with the marriage, if 'the two have become one', as is the case with Mr Mathe, the task resembles unscrambling an egg.

Mandla also struggles to accept the loss of his wife. His wife died six years ago, but he does not believe that she is gone and will not be coming back. It seems as though the only way Mandla can cope with his new role is to involve his late wife in the decisions that he makes for instance, he would ask her advice on how to deal with some problems. According to O'Neill and Mendelssohn (2001), adjusting to single-parent status is a process that one goes through by learning to cope with the new demands of

their parenting roles and by establishing one's identity as a single person.

All four men miss their wives, and parenting their children on their own is not easy, but they realize that they have to move on for the sake of their children. Greif (1990) and Christofferson (1998) add that widowers manage to take care of their children just as well as other single fathers and generally better than single mothers in the same situation. Pollack (1995) argues that men's nurturing urge, often suppressed in boyhood and adult socialization tasks could be stimulated dramatically by becoming single fathers. Burgess (1995) adds that widowers are capable of giving loving care to their children who need emotional and physical support. Mr Mathe feels that he is doing well as a single father. He says he thinks that he is better than parents who are 'double'.

These fathers may initially struggle to adjust to the new role as they are still grappling with the loss of their spouses, but, in time, they learn to cope (Greif, 1990). It seems the loss that Matt feels at the moment makes it difficult for him at times to connect to the one person to whom he is most strongly connected to, his daughter Emily.

Situations and places where husband and wife used to be together make the loss more intense. Mandla avoids situations and places where he used to be with his wife because it is too painful. Mr Mathe does not go anywhere; he is either at work or with his children. His wife was his life because, for him, family, meaning the extended family, did not mean anything. It seems as though these widowers struggle with their new identity which does not include their late wives. Rando (1998, p. 135) claims that the death of a spouse confronts one with the loss of a significant part of one's self; someone who was crucial in helping one define one's self and one's world.

Marko says that for him it is the fact that he has to take decisions about how to raise Jannie alone that he finds difficult to deal with. He also comments on the fact that a child has to have two parents and his loss of Corrie's advice regarding parenting is evident when Marko talks about the challenges of single parenting.

The theme of loneliness is on a continuum which fluctuates between feelings of lesser and greater loneliness which occurs when the widowed fathers find

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themselves in situations or places which remind them of
their deceased wives and they experience feelings of being
supported by friends and family. Robertson and Utterback
(1986, p. 98) note that even when friends make an effort to
stay in touch, the newly single person often feels out of
place with the friends they knew as a couple, like the
proverbial 'fifth wheel'.

Being the best parent

All four fathers perceive themselves positively as
parents; they see themselves as good parents. Belchman and
Carlson in Dowd (1997) found that two heterosexual parents
are not necessary for healthy cognitive, emotional or sex-
role development in children. High quality parenting in
single-parent families can compensate for the lack of the
other parent (Belchman & Carlson in Dowd, 1997). These
fathers view their family and their parenting insights as
being better than those of two parents. Burgess (1985) adds
that widowed fathers find it less difficult to adjust to
the new role of sole parenting if they were involved in
child-rearing while the wives were still alive. All four
fathers were responsible in one way or another for caring
for their children before their wives died.

The fathers have different ways of being the best parent they can be for their children. For instance, Marko keeps things the same and sticks to the routine that Jannie knew when his wife was alive. For Mandla, knowing what is happening with his children all the time is important. Mr Mathe feels that his family needs to be together without outside interference from the extended family members. Matt, on the other hand, feels that he has to be independent of his family because his nuclear family now consists of him and Emily.

Having a good relationship with their children was perceived by the four fathers as the positive part of being single parents. They stated that it had been rewarding to see how much closer they were to their children compared to the time before the single-parent status. It has taken a lot of work from the fathers to secure the closeness with their children. Osherson (1997) maintains that fathers are capable of being emotionally present in their families. The fact that fathers can be more than breadwinners or providers is viewed as one of the reasons why studies found that widowed men cope better with lone parenting (Burgess, 1998; Greif, 1990; Monaghan-Leckband, 1978).

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Three of the fathers experienced discomfort and
conflict in their new roles as single parents. It is
sometimes the little things that prove to be the toughest
for single parents; for instance, some parents find it
difficult to combine the two roles, to be loving and
affectionate and also to be the disciplinarian (Shaw,
2005).

The fathers perceive themselves as being too harsh,
and their greatest challenge is to keep the balance between
giving love to their children and maintaining discipline.
Lamb (1997) indicates that the difficulty for fathers is
how to combine the contrasting images of authority and
intimacy into a coherent whole. Osherson (1995) notes that
the very definition of what it means to be a good father
has shifted from a predominant provider/breadwinner role to
more ambiguous expectations of emotional involvement and
responsiveness.

Despite the challenges that theses fathers experienced
as widowers and as single fathers, their families were
functional and what they did was consistent with the
structure of their family system. Lamb (1997) argues that

there is no single father role to which all fathers should aspire; rather, a successful father as defined in terms of his children's development is one whose role performance matches the demands and prescriptions of his socio-cultural and familial context.

It seems as if the fathers in this study were able to deal with social messages or stereotypes regarding single fatherhood and widowhood. Lund (2001) states that widowers usually remarried as soon as possible after the death of their spouse since it was a socially accepted solution to single parenthood. Mandla has been widowed for six years and he does not have plans to remarry soon. Marko says that he will probably remarry but it would not be happening soon. Even Matt who says that he is not capable of living alone is not planning to remarry soon. Mr Mathe feels that his children need all his attention now and he does not want them to share him with someone now. All parents need to develop a balance between their own needs and those of their children (Silverman in Boerner & Silverman, 2001).

Parents in this study, in their endeavour to be good parents, are still trying to negotiate how to look after themselves without neglecting their children. At the moment

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they feel that their children come first. Mr Mathe says that the best part of being a single parent is being able to deliver for the children and making sure that everything in the house is normal as before. Boerner and Silverman (2001) add that most bereaved parents try to keep the balance between their own and their children's needs with varying degrees of sensitivity and responsiveness to their children.

Routines and rituals

The four families seem to have adopted new routines or they have tried to maintain the routines that existed before the death of the wife and mother. Moriarty and Wagner (2004, p. 194) define family routines as "symbolic relationship patterns occurring in meaningful ways among family members on a consistent basis". For Marko's family, keeping all the rules and developing the ritual where he and Jannie could talk about Corrie in the evenings before Jannie went to sleep was very meaningful for both of them. Marko and Jannie seem to have found solace in the special time that they created to remember Corrie. Mandla's family watched Thato's 33rd birthday video and that seemed to bring

all of them together during the time when it was very painful to think about her death.

McCubbin in Moriarty and Wagner (2004) states the rituals and routines are used by families as coping mechanisms during times of stress. McCubbin in Moriarty and Wagner (2004) further notes the importance and value that single-parent families attach to these practices to promote family unity and stability. Mr Mathe felt that it was important to maintain the status quo in the house and that everything should remain as normal as before; Marko said that following routine helped to prevent confusion. Moriarty and Wagner (2004) remark that as a family evolves, each ritual has its own unique or sometimes related purpose of providing structure and instilling certain values or qualities. Kennedy and Spencer King (1994, p. xi) propose that the family is

> made strong not by the number of heads counted at the dinner table, but by the rituals that help create the family, by the memories you share, by the commitment of time …

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The study of these four widowed single parents'
stories illustrate how the ritual or routine adopted by
their families helped in the coping and maintenance of
homeostasis within the respective families. Single-parent
families are subjected to different sets of stressors and
different exposure to these stressors; however, each family
used rituals as a form of positive adaptation to these
stressors (Moriarty & Wagner, 2004).

Franklin in Simmons (1984, p. 202) says: "Things that
hurt instruct". The four widowers have experienced
tremendous loss and pain and they have learned from their
experiences. Some days are better than others.

The next chapter discusses the conclusions and
implications of the study. The chapter ends with the
researcher's reflections of the study and how she was
touched by it.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Stereotypical labels often describe single parents as being irresponsible and negligent with an uncertain future. It is often deficiency instead of sufficiency which becomes the focus of single-parent families (Jeter, 1995). This study has shown that single parenthood can be uplifted to the level of an archetype.

There is a sense of nobleness in the stories of those courageous enough to tell the 'truth' about their lives and experience. It was my privilege to witness and listen to private and sometimes painful expressions of personal 'truth'. These single fathers were not afraid to expose their vulnerabilities and struggles. Each widowed single father's journey is unique and substantially different from the others. At the same time, every story suggests similar dynamics: wanting to be the best parent for their children.

Table 1: Themes co-occurring within and across the interviews

MARKO	MATT	MR MATHE	MANDLA
	Helplessness	Control and Helplessness	
Connectedness and Isolation	Isolation versus Support	Isolation	Closeness and Distance
Keeping things the same		Aiming to be the best 'mother and mother	Protection
	Time available versus time needed		
			Disbelief
Responsibility			

Summary of the participants' meta-themes

- Adjustment to loss and loneliness

- Being the best parent

- Routines and rituals

In summary, these parents moved from the stereotyped role of single parents who are not coping with parenting to an archetypal role where they are the best for their families. These parents and their families moved from loneliness to reconnection; one parent got advice from his dead wife. Other parents made use of the support system from their extended families, church and friends. There was also a move from single to best parent through keeping things the same by means of routines. Isolation of the nuclear family from the extended family assisted some in maintaining control of their nuclear family and protecting it from disintegration.

These families progressed from chaos and emptiness to routines and rituals by keeping and maintaining rules in their families. Special times were created where some

families did things together like watching videos of the
deceased parent together during periods when they felt that
they could not cope with the loss and hurt. Story telling
rituals were also used by some to deal with their loss and
pain. A shift from helplessness to adequacy was facilitated
by managing time available for family and for self. To
compensate for difficulties in coping with the overwhelming
task of doing everything alone, lists of actions were made
to put structure to activities of daily living.

This study focused on the widowers' experiences of
single parenting. Based on the deficit model of single
parenting, it is assumed that single parents are inadequate
as parents and that children raised by single parents are
mostly delinquents (Dowd, 1997). In Chapter 3, the
literature states that fathers are not capable of caring
for their children and that children need two parents to be
well adjusted. Parsons' and Bales' (1956) sex role theory
claims that men's role in parenting is that of being
financial providers to the family, while mothers are the
nurturers. Men in this study are both providers and
nurturers to their children; although it is a struggle to
combine the two roles, they are doing the best they can.

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The degree of role strain depends on the age of the
children and the amount of outside assistance available.
Younger children require more physical and emotional care.
The father with the youngest child, four years, seemed to
have found a way of dealing with his single father status.
He was the one who was the most supported by family,
friends and the church.

The widowers in this study recognized that their
strength and growth had not eliminated the painful memories
of their lost ones. All four of them said that life had to
go on and they felt that for the sake of their children
they had to be strong. They believe that although they lost
their spouses, they have gained something invaluable, the
special bond with their children.

Children from these families could expect to be cared
for, nurtured, and loved by their fathers. Silverman in
Boerner and Silverman (2001) states that widows and
widowers need to develop a balance between their own needs
and those of their children. Jackson (1987) adds that
fathers who express non-traditional beliefs about parenting
roles felt more competent in their roles as single fathers.
Another aspect that seemed healthy is the extent and

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quality of communication between children and their

fathers. There appeared not to be an issue regarding sex-

role identification between fathers and their daughters.

The fathers with girls claim that they have grown closer to

their daughters after the death of their wives. Pedersen

(1981) argues that the traditional theoretical approach to

female and male behaviour has been in terms of a

unidimensional, bipolar construct in which masculinity-

femininity is roughly equated with the instrumental-

expressive dimension. Pedersen (1981) further states that

it has been found that men and women are androgynous and

they are more likely to perform cross-sex behaviours; they

are less constrained by sex-role stereotypes. One father

who has been widowed for six years states that he connects

better with his daughter than with the sons and there is an

openness that transcends gender. Lamb (1997) states that

fathers and mothers seem to influence their children in

similar, rather than dissimilar ways.

The characteristics of individual fathers such as

their masculinity, intellect and even their warmth are less

important than the characteristics of the relationships

that they have established with their children (Lamb,

1997). The one father who has been widowed for six months

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is worried that he might not be able to answer his daughter's sexuality questions.

These parents experience role conflict and it becomes a source of great discomfort. The intensity of role conflict is related to their feeling responsible to maintain the 'status quo' as one of the fathers claimed. Their concern for their families drives them to be 'perfect' in their new role.

A high priority for these families was the importance of relationships; all fathers revealed that they needed others and three of them reached out to others when they needed help. For these fathers, it is important to have an open and honest relationship with their children. They appear to derive pleasure in their interactions with their children and although available quality time is limited, they have rituals which bring them together to connect on a deeper level. These widowers have taken charge of their lives; they are resilient and determined to make the best of the situation in which they find themselves.

At the time of the study, none of the fathers was in therapy and three of them felt that they found healing

through interaction with others. These three fathers stated that the best advice they could give to someone in their position is that they should make use of the available support. One said: "as men, we should put pride in our pockets and ask for help". Several studies (Burgess, 1995; Bustanoby, 1985; Greif, 1990; Greif, 1995; Monaghan-Leckband, 1978) have shown that widowers get more support from the extended family than other parents do.

Widowed single parents in this study are motivated to submit to single parenthood, perhaps due to the positive sentiments they hold for their children. The negativistic structural approach to the study of families has limitations (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Dowd, 1997; Monaghan-Leckband, 1978). Single parents are capable of creating a cohesive, warm, supportive and favourable environment for the development of their children (Monaghan-Leckband, 1978).

This study has revealed that widowed single fathers, while continuing to fill the traditional family role of providers are also capable of providing tender, loving care for the emotional and physical needs of their children.

Implications for single parents

The four widowed single parents in this study showed that although it is not easy and not without sacrifices, single parenting is 'do-able'. (Mendes, 1978; Prater, 1995; Shireman, 1995) state that single male parents may experience role strain as they are required to perform both male and female duties. Monaghan-Leckband, (1978) further adds that lone parenting poses some challenges, but single parents are able to adjust and adapt to the new role. These men are heading families which are functional and they are not planning to abdicate their duties just because they sometimes feel like they cannot cope with the responsibilities of single parenting. They perceive their families as normal and they perceive themselves as better than parents in two-parent families.

Monaghan-Leckband (1978) states that the idealization of the two-parent families has masked both its weaknesses and the strengths of the single parent family. Dowd (1997) maintains that the veneration of the nuclear two-parent family as a core social organization does not reflect the reality of family structures.

The development of social norms and values which support different types of family systems would be beneficial to the society. Labelling family types different from the traditional two-parent household as 'deviant' appears not to have served any purpose for the single-parent family. Kamerman and Kahn in Dowd (1997) state that a single-parent family is a euphemism for 'problem family' and is perceived as some kind of social pathology.

Studies on single-parent families have focused on problems encountered by these families and conclusions have been that single-parent families are dysfunctional, broken, deviant and problem families (Javo, Ronning, Heyerdahl & Rudmin 2004; Snyman, 1993). Gongla in Dowd (1997) further adds that the stigma we attach to single-parent families most significantly results in the economic and social isolation of these families. Positive attributes of single parent families have been ignored due to the stigma that walls off any recognition of insights exemplified by these families (Dowd, 1997).

As a single parent, I feel encouraged by the stories of these parents. I know that being a lone parent is not a

walk in the park, but that there are advantages —— for
instance, the connection between me and my children is
stronger.

Implications for psychotherapists

It is significant for psychotherapists to understand
and view families as they (these families) perceive
themselves. None of the fathers in this study thought their
families were broken or deviant. In therapy, the therapist
should be aware of his/her preconceived ideas regarding
functional families. A family, as defined by Auerswald
(1990) is a patterned set of connected events in a
relational domain. This means that families should not be
seen in terms of the organization and who is doing what:
rather the question should be how things are done in the
particular family; that is, how who is connecting with
whom.

It is easy for therapists to want to rescue the
single-parent family, thereby becoming a co-parent with the
single parent rather than being a therapist. Especially in
the case of single fathers, female therapists may tend to
take on the mother role when dealing with this family

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because of the absence of the mother. The social
constructionist view of reality is that there is a
multiverse of realities; meaning that how we see families
may be different to how they see themselves.

Limitations of the study

From the second order cybernetics viewpoint we can
never know the 'truth' as it is self-referential. As a
researcher, the interpretation of the stories of the four
single fathers was informed partly by my past and by my
prejudices. Social constructionists add that meanings we
construe are not the only constructions that could exist.
Stories of these single fathers represent a slice in time;
what was accurate in the moment of the interview may not be
so today. These are sacred, but historically-limited
moments in the lives of the single fathers interviewed.

Reflections of the researcher

Reflection means interpreting one's own
interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives, and
turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as
interpreter and author. Reflection is above all a question

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of recognising fully the ambivalent relation of a researcher's text to the realities studied.

This study made me aware how connected we are to others. I was struck by how I, also a single parent, felt similar to these fathers at times. I had to constantly remind myself of how the study touches me and not to impart my own meanings to their stories. I noted how the flow of the conversation changed from participant to participant, influenced by our different personalities and also by my gaining confidence as I moved towards the end of the interviews. Listening to the tapes and reading the transcripts, I became aware how abrupt and context insensitive I was at times when I did not ask questions after certain comments that the participants made.

This comment by Dilthey in Simmons (1985, p. 224): "one discovers himself in the other person" rang true for me during the process of this study. I discovered myself in the four widowed single fathers. Their experience sometimes paralleled mine. When their experiences were different and their attachment of meaning to that experience differed from mine, I still learned about myself. I also learned about myself as a therapist and how important rapport is

when joining with your clients. With hindsight, I think
that if I were to interview the same participants again, it
would be done differently. I am not saying that I would get
a better story from the participants, but I would ask fewer
leading questions.

As I reflect on the entire process I now realize how
biased the society is regarding single parents in general
and single fathers in particular. These fathers did not
neglect or go into relationships immediately after they
found themselves alone. They are proud single fathers who
are aware of the challenges facing them, but who are not
prepared to abandon their responsibilities towards their
children.

Suggestions for further research

This study supports the findings of other studies
which claim that men are capable of raising children on
their own as single parents. Single-parent family research
is still in its infancy in spite of the fact that these
families are the largest growing family type in this
country. There were few studies of single parents in this
country which were not deficit model oriented. As the

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traditional two-parent family rapidly disappears in this country due to AIDS related deaths, it is likely that men will become increasingly active in child care.

More research is needed on the impact of single fatherhood on children's development. It would be interesting to hear the children's stories about their fathers who raised them on their own. The questions to ask would be: How do children perceive their fathers' parenting? How would children from these families fare as adults? Other future studies may include both fathers and their children to examine differences, if any. It was obvious to me that these men were in charge of their lives; they were resilient and determined to survive. This study indicates, as does the literature on the subject, that single parents have much positive impact on their children; that they may be the most significant aspect in their children's lives. Yet, I sense that the process is two-directional and that mutual shaping is going on. How that happens and what the impact of the child is on the father would be most interesting to look at.

Although this study was primarily concerned with single fathers, this does not rule out the need to explore

the role of their families of origin in shaping their

attitude towards single parenting.

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