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South African gay fathers' parenting practices: from pathology to 'normalisation'

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The article reflects the findings of a qualitative sociological study in which in-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires were employed with gay fathers. The article highlights the realisation of the principles of generative fathering in the parenting practices of the fathers and the manner in which pathological views of gay men, in general, influenced these practices of the fathers. One of the findings underscored this objective by emphasising that sexual orientation played a minimal role in the parenting practices of gay fathers. Factors associated with the gay men's own socialisation, parenting skills and support from their marital or life partners proved to be more influential in terms of their role as parents.

Die ouerskapspraktyke van Suid-Afrikaanse gay vaders: van patologie tot 'normalisering'

Die artikel bied die bevindinge van 'n kwalitatiewe sosiologiese studie waarin in-diepte onderhoude en self-voltooide vraelyste met gay vaders gebruik is. Die artikel het ten doel om die realisering van die beginsels van generatiewe vaderskap in die ouerskapspraktyke van gay vaders uit te lig en om te fokus op die wyse waarop patologiese sienings van gay mans in die algemeen 'n invloed op die ouerskapspraktyke van gay vaders uitgeoefen het. Faktore soos die gay mans se eie sosialisering, ouerskapsvaardighede en ondersteuning van hul huweliks- of lewensmaats het 'n groter invloed op hul rol as vaders gehad.

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Gay men may experience the need to either become fathers or play a more intricate part in the lives of their children. These children may be from previous heterosexual relationships (or marriages), or newly adopted by gay men after 'coming out'. Yet this link between homosexuality and parenting has never been met with a great deal of enthusiasm. Several authors have questioned this synergy, posing questions such as "How can two loving, homosexual men teach a young boy to care for and love a woman? … What will two loving moms teach a little girl about men?" (Stanton & Maier 2005: 71).

Regardless of such views, same-sex marriage legislation and adoption rights for gay and lesbian couples in South Africa underscore the changing nature of traditional views of married and family life, and thus necessitate the importance of an intricate study of the nature of gay parenting as one of these new familial forms (*cf* De Vos 2008, Leonard 2005, Quintal 2006: 5). This notion is emphasised by Cohen & Savin-Williams (1996: 1) who argue that "in no other time in history have lesbians, gays, and bisexuals been the recipients of so much overt attention and scrutiny". This serves as motivation for adding an extra dimension to the study on the diverse nature of fathering.

The present study highlights the fact that there existed minimal differences between heterosexual and gay fathers in terms of the impact of the principles of generative fathering on their definitions of fathering and actual fathering practices. The concept "generativity", originated by Erik H Erikson in his lifespan-model of psychosocial development, is defined as "the desire to establish and nurture young people" (Richter 2006: 62), whereas generative fathering, in turn, refers to "fathering that meets the needs of children by working to create and maintain a developing ethical relationship with them" (Dollahite *et al* 1997: 18). This emphasises the idea that the sexual orientation of the respondents plays a minimal role in the effectiveness and, by implication, the definition of what a father should be. However, It is apparent that the definitions of fathering, parenting and its related practices are determined by the manner in which these fathers approach their relationship with their children and

the manner in which external factors influence this approach. This thought thus questions ideas that perpetuate the so-called contradiction that exists between the concepts "gay" and "father", and thus the possibility of a gay man to be able to serve as father for children.

By implication then, what follows is a discussion on this intricate connection and this seemingly contradictory relationship between debates on homosexuality and parenting. A concise overview of literature on the topic will focus first on the reader's attention towards the manner in which the meaning of homosexuality has progressed since its inception in 1869 up to the present day and, secondly, on the way in which it is interrelated with debates on gay parenting, in general, and gay fathering, in particular. This will be followed by an overview of the methodological framework adopted in the study, after which a discussion of the principal findings associated with gay fathering will be provided.

1. The changing face of fathering: from moral caregiver to nurturing caregiver

Cohen (1993: 1) is of the opinion that the dominant views of fathers have traditionally been linked to "providing" the economic needs of their families, a thought that aligns with gender ideologies of men generally being regarded as the dominant of the two sexes. As such, Cancian (Cohen 1993: 2) argues that parenting has mainly been equated with "mothering", a so-called "ethic of care", associated with nurture and empathy (Ritzer & Goodman 2003), in other words, with women. Yet, despite these views, Pleck (Lamb 1995: 20) cites four phases[1] through which the concept of fatherhood has progressed. Each phase presented a new dominant theme and subsequent role for the father that overshadowed the preceding ones.

1 It should be noted that these phases are based on studies undertaken in predominantly the USA and thus represent Western models on parenting. Based on, what one could deem, the Westernised nature of contemporary South Africa, much of the insights enmeshed in Lamb's (1995) work was applicable to the research population of the particular study, as will be evident from the overview of methodological considerations.

The first of these saw the father acting as moral caregiver and teacher, in other words a moral father figure (Lamb 1995: 20). His main responsibilities centred on the socialisation of children in the use of and adherence to appropriate values and norms as taught by, among others, Biblical scriptures. With the advent of industrialisation, a definite shift took place in the manner in which the role of the father was conceptualised (Lamb 1995: 20). In this instance the role of moral teacher was replaced with that of a second role, the breadwinner, which dominated ideas concerning fatherhood from the mid-nineteenth century to the Great Depression. The father's moral responsibilities were still evident, but breadwinning became the yardstick in identifying a "good father" (Lamb 1995: 21). As a result of the Great Depression and disruption caused by the Second World War, a new conceptualisation of fatherhood arose – the gender role model (Lamb 1995: 21). This portrayed fathers in a more dominant role in the lives of their sons as it related to the importance of traditional gender roles.

Yet in the mid-1970s a fourth stage emerged in which fathers were identified as "active, nurturant, caretaking parents" (Lamb 1995: 21). The active participation and involvement of fathers were deemed imperative factors for successful parenting, in effect becoming the new yardstick whereby "good fathers" were defined. In this instance Dollahite *et al* (1997) emphasise the role of generative fathering. Applied to parenting, generative fathering refers to "a broad framework that adds clarity to the craft of fathering from sociological and ethical as well as psychological perspectives" (Snarey 1997: ix). Generativity consists of so-called components and categories. Pertaining to the first, interaction, accessibility and paternal responsibility are deemed imperative for the parenting roles of fathers. Interaction refers to a direct involvement with the child, accessibility argues for proximal closeness between father and child, whereas paternal responsibility highlights the father's responsibility and accountability for the welfare of the child (Lamb 1995: 23-4). In addition, Dollahite *et al* (1997) also identify four categories associated with generative fathering:

- Ethical work focuses on paternal responsibility, in particular, insofar as it involves the provision of a safe and secure family environment for the children, and in effect responding to the wants and needs of the child (*cf* Biller 1993, Dollahite *et al* 1997: 27, Smit 2004: 108).
- Stewardship refers to the degree to which the father is able to provide the necessary material and human resources.
- Development work necessitates that the father adapts to the different social, cognitive and psychological changes through which children progress during their developmental phases (Smit 2004: 108).
- Relationship work entails that the father should serve as socialisation agent in an attempt to teach his children to be more inclined to take others into account, rather than only focusing on their own, self-centred viewpoints.[2]

Such an involvement, however, does not surface only based on changing views or expectations of fathering roles. Lamb (1997: 5) identifies four factors that serve as determinants of the levels of involvement that fathers display in their children's lives. These include motivation, skills and self-confidence, institutional practices and support.

Motivation comprises the individual's developmental history (Lamb 1997: 6, Pleck 1997: 80). It is argued that men are prone to model their paternal behaviour on the way in which their own fathers raised them (*cf* Brotherson 2007b: 399, LaRossa 1988: 451, Snarey 1993: 304). Modelling of their father's behaviour is likely to occur in three instances. First, their father was relatively better educated, thus providing for the socio-emotional needs of the child during childhood. Secondly, if the father was better employed and able to provide for the socio-emotional needs of the child during adolescence and, thirdly, if the familial setting was characterised by a cohesive home atmosphere, which subsequently aids the father in providing for the social-emotional needs of his own children during

2 *Cf* Dollahite *et al* 1997, Erikson 1984: 240, Marsiglio 1995: 84, Snarey 1993.

adolescence (Snarey 1993: 305). On the other hand, it is also argued that fathers steer away from the manner in which they were socialised, attempting to compensate for their own fathers' lack of nurture, interaction and involvement by reworking their own parenting principles (*cf* Lamb 1997: 6, Pleck 1997: 80, Snarey 1993: 304). A study undertaken by Daly (Pleck 1997: 81) found that men did not regard their own fathers' parenting models in a positive manner and would like to improve on the way in which they raise their children.

Related to skills and self-confidence, research has indicated that despite the fathers' motivation to participate in primary childrearing, they experience a lack of possible rules or guidelines to direct their behaviour or the help of others upon whom their behaviour could be modelled (Barclay & Lupton 1999: 1019, Lamb 1997: 7). Rather than experiencing their paternal roles as fulfilling, they communicate feelings of distress and use words such as "cope" when relating information about their parenting experiences. In terms of institutional practices, the increase in numbers of women entering into the labour market – and the subsequent increase in responsibilities both spouses face – various organisations have opted to acknowledge their employees' additional domestic and parental responsibilities outside the parameters of the labour market (Harker 1995: 90). Examples of such policies include flexible working arrangements such as flexitime, part-time work, job-sharing and home-based work, as well as part-time work at home. Finally, support was also considered imperative. In this instance, the role of the wife and mother, in influencing the participation of her husband and father to her children, serves as an indicative independent variable (*cf* Aldous *et al* 1998, Snarey 1993). While certain mothers may attempt to exclude fathers from involvement with their children by serving as so-called "gatekeepers" (Doherty *et al* 1998: 287, Jordan 1995: 66), Smit (2008: 68) found encouraging views of mothers in her research in South Africa. Wives of men who commanded a postgraduate degree or occupied managerial positions in the labour market, were perceived to be more accepting of husbands becoming more actively involved in the lives of their children (*cf* Snarey 1993: 302). Smit (2008: 69) attributes this to the fact that these women may be more exposed than

others to feminist thought and therefore influence their husbands to encourage co-parenting.

But how does this apply to the so-called contradictory relationship between homosexuality and parenting?

2. Gay fathering: from pathology to generativity

Consider the following notion of Benkov (1994: 142):

> Lesbian and gay parents essentially reinvent the family as a pluralistic phenomenon. They self-consciously build from the ground up a variety of family types that don't conform to the traditional structure. In so doing, they encourage society to ask, 'What is a family?' The question has profound meaning in both the culture at large and the very heart of each of our intimate lives.

Towards fully realising the potential of such a reinvention of the family as institution in general, and gay fathering specifically, several steps had to be taken. These arose in the early 1970s when, among others, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973 (Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 1). The American Psychological Association did the same in 1975, which, in effect, heralded a new era in which clinicians and researchers started to re-conceptualise and incorporate new dimensions in their views of interactions with and research on issues related to homosexuality (Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 1).

In addition to these factors, the celebration of basic civil rights in society (Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 2), aided by the mobilisation of several lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered organisations in the USA (Barret & Robinson 2000: 5) in the early 1990s, furthered this objective. Legislation in South Africa concerning gay individuals, including adoption and marriage rights, also resulted in change. Such rights afford gay individuals the opportunity to ponder several questions pertaining to parenting issues. These range from "Should we have children?" and "Where do we go to find an adoption agency that is open to sexual minorities?" (Barret and Robinson 2000: 6). A survey undertaken by Bryant and Demian (Barret & Robinson 2000: 6) indicated that approximately one-third of the gay fathers

who took part in their study (under the age of thirty-five) expressed the need to become fathers, citing the realisation of "a rich source of life satisfaction in parenting".

Despite the possibility of enjoying this "rich source", creating a synergy between the concepts of gay, on the one hand, and fathering, on the other, has been met with a great deal of disillusionment. Several authors cited the improbability of such a synergy. Patterson & Chan (2000: 245), for example, argue that "the idea of gay fatherhood can seem exotic or even impossible". Others argue that the categories of "gay" and "father" occupy two opposite and by implication contrasting, contradictory and incompatible identities.[3] Berkowitz & Marsiglio (2007: 366), Patterson (2000: 1052) and Taylor (1997: 85) describe such an amalgam as being controversial in nature, with the former two citing the challenges such a family formation will face in terms of the negotiation and construction of gender roles and sexuality. What should be regarded as contradictory, according to Voeller & Walters (1978: 149), is the fact that a polarisation should be established between people as being heterosexual and homosexual, rather than the two being merely two sexual variants. For this reason, the sanctity, stability and foundations of the traditional family (regarded as heterosexual in nature), are perceived to be threatened (Lutzer 2004, Pfluger 1997: 448). Even from within the gay community itself, activists regard such a move as radical in nature. They argue that

> "[r]eal gay men don't need to mimic the lives of straights by buying into the foundations of their lifestyle" (Barret & Robinson 2000: 6).

But does such a movement towards gay fathering presuppose a mirror image of heterosexual fathering and its distinct practices? Or does such a movement serve to fully capture the unique, novel and generative contributions that gay fathers can make to the lives of their children, and subsequently, to family sociology in general?

3 *Cf* Baptiste 1987: 114, Bigner & Jacobsen 1989a: 174, Bozett 1988: 214, Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht 1993: 257.

2.1 Conceptualising 'homosexuality': from pathology to tolerance?

It is interesting to note that there exists an overlooked distinction between the categories "homosexual" and "gay", used, quite often, in an interchangeable manner both academically and on societal level. The category of "homosexuality" dominated discourse about same-sex attraction for nearly a century, viewed in a pathological manner, thus, as condition or disease (Herdt 1992: 4). The category of "gay" only came to the forefront in the 1950s and 1960s, and most evidently in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. This category transcended the mere focus on same-sex attraction as a sexual category and clinical condition, and progressed towards the inclusion of a cultural system that comprised a "spectrum of social life". This included gay social practices, roles and networks which manifested in a particular form of normative behaviour, attitudes and even strategies to curtail the negative effects of stigmatisation (*cf* Cass 1984: 117, Herdt 1992: 4-5). Cass (1990: 240) argues that this period focused increasingly on the "personalities" of individuals, whether heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual, rather than merely focusing on "activities" that rendered homosexuals as sick or deviant. The rise of ideologies that included "individual rights, tolerance of differences, and the importance of self-fulfilment" again emerged in both society and academia, with primary concern for the individual's (and, one may argue, group of individuals') distinct view of themselves and society (Cass 1990: 240). In a discussion on the formation of "homosexual cultures" in Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco, the impact of the Stonewall Riot in 1969 and the annual Gay Pride Parade internationally, Herdt (1992: 11) notes that the stigma that plagued the nature of homosexuality has lead to a "transition from homosexual (secret) to gay (public)".

Regardless of this, the most prominent obstacle referenced by gay fathers is the fear of the manner in which their sexual orientation may influence their relationship with their children. In addition, they may also consider how their children will be treated by the community of which they form part, based on the latter's awareness

of the father's sexual orientation (Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 131, Patterson 2000: 1054).

2.2 Reasons for becoming a father

Despite the mentioned fears and considerations, several gay men still display the need to become fathers. Reasons may include the efforts of gay men to obtain equality in the seemingly homophobic society and the need for higher status (*cf* Bigner & Bozett 1990: 158, Patterson & Chan 1997: 252). Secondly, gay men may want to become fathers because of their inability to deal with their orientation before entering into a heterosexual marriage and subsequently having children with their wives. Thirdly, these men want to become fathers because of their desire to parent, based on a so-called "dissatisfaction with a less 'rooted' gay lifestyle" (Bigner & Jacobsen 1989a: 165). If gay fathers were to decide to obtain a more "rooted" lifestyle, they may fourthly seek to have children merely for the added joy, value and psychological well-being children may bring to their lives (*cf* Bigner & Bozett 1990: 159, Bozett 1987a: 12). But how does this "added joy" manifest in their actual relationship with their children?

2.3 Gay fathers and their children: the impact of gay fathering on the child

Consider the following proclamation by a woman raised by two lesbian mothers:

> I had two people who cared about me, looked after me when I was sick […] cheered at my graduations and cried at my wedding. I defy anyone to look me in the eye and say there's something wrong with that (Myers & Scanzoni 2005: 122).

Although associated with lesbian parents, such a quotation may also correspond with the expectations and experiences of children raised within a gay-father household – from the initial disclosure of the father's sexual orientation to obstacles they have to face within a predominantly heterosexual society.

2.3.1 'Coming out' to the children: obstacles and recommendations

One of the most important considerations for gay fathers is whether or not to disclose their sexual orientation to their children (Bigner & Bozett 1990: 160). These authors cite several issues that intensify such a decision, including the necessity and appropriateness of doing so, the most appropriate time for disclosure, as well as the best means. Bigner & Bozett (1990: 160) referenced the work of Bozett (1981: 98) who identified two events that promote the disclosure of the identity of the gay father. These include the divorce or separation of the couple (heterosexual marriage) and when the gay father enters into a relationship with another gay man. Although such a disclosure may be associated with a higher degree of psychological and social well-being (Bigner & Bozett 1990: 166), the inherent fear of gay men based on homophobia may inhibit such a realisation (*cf* Garner 2005: 42), even in a democratic society such as South Africa. In addition, gay fathers may also decide to disclose their sexual orientation in an attempt to establish personal and community integrity. This thought is attributed to the fact that foreclosure of a gay identity may result in further isolation of gay individuals from the rest of society. This, in effect, reinforces the stigma attached to the gay community as "the other" (Garner 2005: 42). By proclaiming his homosexuality, the father affirms that he values his homosexuality (Bozett 1984: 62). In addition, foreclosure of his sexual orientation may result in a great deal of animosity between the gay father and his children. An example of this found representation in a study that had a son discovering his father's sexual orientation after reading correspondence between his father and another man on the father's computer. This resulted in a relationship of distrust and trauma between the gay father and his son, with the latter ending their relationship (Drucker 1998: 123).

In support of this notion, other studies have found that, despite the admiration and love children may display towards their fathers, they do not condone their homosexuality (Bozett 1987b: 51). These children

> ... separate their father's *gay* identity from his *father* identity, with one daughter fostering the belief that her father may 'burn in hell' based on his gay identity, for 'If he wasn't gay I'd say he was sent from heaven. That's how impressed I am with him (Bozett 1987b: 51).

Such views lead to children avoiding any possible disclosure of their father's identity to others to the extent of isolating themselves from others. Eric Gutierrez (2002: 24), raised by a gay father, recalls the manner in which he handled the situation:

> ... I began lying about my father [and] I began lying about myself. I didn't offer my lies indiscriminately [...] I would lie only when cornered, or when the truth didn't seem like enough. [...] I didn't lie to win friends but to not make myself even more of an outcast.

Other studies provided different findings. Many children displayed their acceptance of their father's sexual orientation both on a behavioural and verbal level (Bozett 1987a: 13). One of Bozett's (1981: 102) American respondents told of his children wanting to experience his "gay lifestyle", by going to gay bars and dancing with him. Another daughter argued that "All I needed to know is if he were gay. I didn't really need to know anything else" (Drucker 1998: 144). She attributed this to the fact that a "good parent is one who listens, is there, and just loves you". In disclosing his sexual orientation, the gay father affords his children the right to experience his world in both a literal and symbolic manner, possibly resulting in a more intimate relationship between gay fathers and their children (Bozett 1984: 63).

Studies have shown that both the gay couple and their children experience fear of being maltreated, teased, ridiculed or harassed (*cf* Meezan & Rauch 2005: 103, Voeller & Walters 1978: 156).

2.3.2 External and internal ostracism

Much of the antagonism directed towards gay individuals is cemented within possible perceptions, misconceptions, and what Barret & Robinson (2000: 38) and Mallon (2004) refer to as "myths". These myths include the disturbed parental relationship myth, germ myth, child molestation and sex-fiend myth. The disturbed relationship myth argues that gay men were raised

by functionally absent fathers and overly involved mothers, which led these men to gravitate towards homosexuality (Barret & Robinson 2000: 38). Secondly, the children of these gay men may also experience fears of also "becoming gay", based on their father's sexual orientation (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht 1993: 257). This is the main premise of Barret & Robinson's (2000: 38) germ myth. Such a myth primarily argues that interaction between the gay fathers and their children will "transmit" their sexual orientation to their children. Reference can be made, for example, to the work of Goffman (1963), who remarked on the nature of his "with" relationship.

A third myth establishes a link between gay men and child molestation (Mallon 2004: 14). Such a myth argues that gay men are more likely to molest their children than heterosexual men, thus typifying the gay father as a paedophile (Berkowitz & Marsiglio 2007: 374). In addition to notions of child molestation, the behaviour of gay men has also been equated with promiscuity, a thought associated with the so-called sex-fiend myth (Barret & Robinson 2000: 48).

Although one may think that such obstacles are exclusive to the heterosexual community, research has focused on the internal prejudice and discrimination existent among (and towards) gay individuals themselves. Bigner & Bozett (1990: 159) argue that it is quite common for gay fathers to experience a lack of support, rejection and discrimination from other gay individuals. This, according to them, is attributed to the lack of freedom that gay fathers experience, based on their paternal responsibilities, as well as a lack of comprehension and even apprehension regarding children. Much of this is embedded within the idea that the gay community is predominantly childless and, this being so, having children becomes a stigma rather than status symbol (Baptiste 1987: 123). This sees the construction of a so-called "double closet" (Bozett 1987a: 11), whereby the gay father has to "come-out" twice, as a gay man and as a gay father.

Both gay fathers and their children experience ostracism by the childless gay community (Baptiste 1987: 124). Such ostracism, the author argues, is anticipated from the heterosexual community, not from their gay counterparts. Isolation then ensues for the gay

father, whereas the child is viewed as a "shadowy figure", often concealed from the broader gay community to curtail any discrimination (Baptiste 1987: 124). Gay fathers view such discrimination in a negative light insofar as they consider the "sense of community" among their gay counterparts as imperative in establishing a true sense of self (Baptiste 1987: 125). If they do, however, decide to be open about their role as gay fathers, these men may opt to live apart from the broader gay community (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht 1993: 256, Drucker 1998: 162, Meyer 1990: 72), on account of the incompatibility of the values of the opposite worlds of "father" and "gay" (Bozett 1987b: 50). Characteristics of the "gay world" sketch gay men as single, financially independent and mobile, whereas the gay father has to adhere to his parental responsibilities within the parameters of certain obligations and restrictions, which are, Bozett (1987a: 10) argues, accepted "without objection". Those gay groupings which are against the establishment of gay families, involving same-sex marriage and gay parenting, attribute this to the fact that an alienation may occur between individuals within the gay community itself, with those who are married being defined as "morally superior" to the "drag queens [and] club crawlers" (Stanton & Maier 2005: 61) on the other side of the spectrum.

Regardless of such obstacles, several positive features have been identified as unique to the gay father's relationship with his children.

2.3.3 Positive influences associated with gay fathers

Gay fathering, in general, makes provision for the opportunity to have gay fathers transcend the traditional boundaries and "... challenge 'family values' rhetoric by expanding the definition of family – emphasising relational aspects like love and commitment over any particular family structure" (Benkov 1994: 7). In doing so, they may provide a novel blueprint for parenting practices for both heterosexual and gay family formations, making these men, "innovators" (Allen 1997: 214) in a sense. These positive influences that gay fathers provide for both their families and society include the following as described below.

In a study undertaken by Johnson & O'Connor (2002: 128), 63% of gay fathers were of the opinion that their home would be conducive to the creation of a context in which their children would be raised to be less prejudiced and more tolerant of diversity. As one respondent noted, "I think they grow up with a better understanding about differences in people and families and are better able to appreciate these differences." As such, a sense of appreciation and acceptance of the diversity of others is established within such a familial setting, as cited in several other studies.[4] In establishing such respect, the gay fathers engage in what Brown (1989: 451) terms normative creativity, thus the creation of a unique family formation with new principles and practices that challenge traditional conceptions of family life.

Secondly, gay fathers are presented as being more appreciative and loving parents than their heterosexual counterparts (Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 129). This is attributed to the possible obstacles gay parents have to face to gain custody of their children, gain their children's acceptance, and undertake procedures to have children or manage homophobic behaviour directed toward them (*cf* Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 129). They are perceived to be more responsive to the needs of the children, display a more active caretaking role, and exude a greater degree of warmth and love in their parenting practices – all of which are factors that are associated with generative fathering.[5] Such results were communicated in the findings of a study undertaken by Meezan & Rauch (2005: 98) that emphasised the durability and stability of gay families.

Thirdly, research has indicated that gay family settings may also promote equitable parenting practices and gender roles. This involves the eradication of traditional gendered conceptions pertaining to the roles of parents, and seeking to establish equality for marital partners in terms of the allocation of their tasks (Johnson &

4 *Cf* Allen 1997: 197, Bozett 1987b: 51, Garner 2005: 33, Meezan & Rauch 2005: 98, Voeller & Walters 1978: 150.

5 *Cf* Allen 1997: 197, Barret & Robinson 2000: 95, Bigner & Bozett 1990: 164, Bozett 1987a: 15, Patterson & Chan 1997: 252, Scallen 1981 (Bigner & Bozett 1990: 163).

O'Connor 2002: 170), with respondents in a study by Blumstein & Schwartz (1983: 505) arguing that they "try to avoid assuming specialized roles and don't think of each other as mimicking husband and wife behaviour". These parents thus challenge what is presumed "normal" in terms of gender roles ascribed to families and marriages (*cf* Allen 1997: 214, Garner 2005: 33). It has been found that gay fathers are more likely to divide their household chores more equitably, with the non-biological father (the lover, boyfriend or husband) afforded the right to also participate in the life of the child (*cf* Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 25, Patterson & Chan 1997: 254). Citing the impossibility of dividing the tasks based on gendered categories (Kurdek 1995: 248), the gay couple is considered androgynous, undertaking tasks deemed either masculine or feminine (*cf* Bigner & Jacobsen 1989b: 184, Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 45). This thought is exemplified in the words of Werner, a 23-year-old gay father in Austria: "I am a single gay male raising a young daughter. I live a great range of gender roles, not just one. I am both mother and father to her, now that her mother has died" (Drucker 1998: 150). In other cases, the tasks allocated to either of the parties are determined to a great extent by the specific phase in which the couple finds itself (McWhirter & Mattison 1984).

Associated with principles of generative fathering, theorists fourthly highlight the lack of importance gay fathers ascribe to the "economic provider role" which dominated discourse on fatherhood for several decades (Bozett 1987a: 15 Bigner & Bozett 1990:16, Patterson & Chan 1997: 252). Despite such arguments, Meezan & Rauch (2005: 108) refer to the higher degree of material well-being the child may experience within a family with a gay father or fathers. Such a view finds representation in Downs' (2006: 75) reference to the role of compensation a gay man may seek in order for him to overcome the shame he experiences before accepting and authenticating his gay identity. One may safely assume that during this period of compensation the gay father attains a degree of personal growth and acceptance as well as material growth, factors that may only act in favour of the well-being of the child.

In the fifth place, Johnson & O'Connor (2002: 170) also highlight the gay couple's satisfactory levels of communication about their children. This thought finds support in the works of both Bigner & Bozett (1990: 163) and Meezan & Rauch (2005), as it relates to the high levels of social investment gay fathers display in the lives of their children. Another novel positive feature one gay father associates with himself as parent is that "I see an advantage if our son turns out to be gay. I think it will be easier for him to come out and accept himself" (Johnson & O'Connor 2002: 130). In accepting their child, parents of any sexual orientation will provide the basis for a greater sense of reciprocal respect and openness between familial members, encouraging children to embrace their identity (heterosexual or gay) (Voeller & Walters 1978: 156). In so doing, these children are more than likely to have many gay friends and will be willing to disclose their sexual orientation and express the possibility of engaging in same-sex relationships (Meezan & Rauch 2005: 103).

3. Methodology

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach in the seven in-depth interviews and five self-administered questionnaires. With in-depth interviews as primary method, provision was made for semi-structured, open-ended questions to generate the necessary subjective perceptions of the gay men taking part in the study. These interviews took place at the places of work or homes where the respondents felt most comfortable. The interviews were arranged in advance and lasted for one to two hours, depending on the feedback from the respondent. With their permission, a tape recording was made of these interviews in an attempt to ensure precise interpretation and analysis of the transcripts. From these interviews, the non-probability sampling method of snowball-sampling led the researcher to additional respondents who contributed proactively to the study (*cf* Neuman 2003). These in-depth interviews were regarded as appropriate for this particular study, due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, and the discreetness that many of the respondents wanted to attain (*cf* Wisker 2001: 165). In addition, self-administered questionnaires

were sent to respondents who were not able to directly interact during in-depth interview sessions. These were also arranged in advance, and a set time for the timely return of the questionnaire by the respondent was communicated (*cf* Babbie & Mouton 2004: 258-9). The interview schedule and self-administered questionnaires were similar in content, including questions on biographical particulars and opinion-related questions on the men's views of their sexual orientation, obstacles they experience as gay fathers, positive features associated with their fathering as well as the role of external agents, such as their families, husbands and/or life-partners, ex-wives and friends in their lives.

Although gay respondents initially displayed a great deal of eagerness and motivation to participate in the study, very few followed through when the researcher began with the fieldwork. One potential respondent attributed his non-participation to the fact that he thought researchers treated respondents, especially gay men, as "guinea pigs" – conducting the interviewing and leaving, without ever providing feedback on their findings. Although laudable, in subscribing to these reasons, these men, according to the researcher, forewent a chance to provide insights into their lifestyles as gay men and fathers, which may have eradicated negative myths held about them. In addition, several potential gay respondents, who might have provided invaluable insights, did not want to participate, because they had not yet disclosed their sexual orientation to their significant others. In some instances, according to contacts of the researcher, these men were still married to women and had children.

As such, the initial choice of respondents was influenced by this very sensitive, subjective and controversial nature of the subject matter, leaving the researcher to welcome the participation of respondents who were willing to partake in the research. The twelve fathers who did take part were Caucasian and Afrikaans-speaking, with only two displaying a bilingual (Afrikaans and English) language usage in their household. In terms of the sex of the children, there were thirteen males and six females, with the mean age being 20 years, the youngest being three years and the oldest 47. From the information available, it was found that the majority of the children

lived with their biological mothers after the divorce (in ten of the cases). In terms of the one exception (the gay father and his husband), the mother gave up her sole custody in favour of their gay father, due to the fact that she goes through, as the father noted, "disappearing acts", always leaving the children with him. At the time of the interview, for example, they did not know anything about her whereabouts. This being the case, they believed that their household would provide a more suitable and stable setting than that of the biological mother.

The age range of the men varied between 40 and 48 (seven respondents), whereas the remaining five were either in their early thirties (two), mid- and late fifties (two) or early seventies (one). Although there existed a definite discrepancy in these ages, the inclusion of these respondents was justified based on the mentioned difficulty associated with gaining access to gay fathers who were willing to participate. Based on this, as well as the theoretical foundation of generative fathering which emphasises selfless care across generations, it was regarded as appropriate to welcome participation by all the gay men who wanted to express their views, whether younger or older.

As far as the geographical location of the men is concerned, five resided in Gauteng, three in the Western Cape, two in KwaZulu-Natal, and two in the North-West province. Seven respondents had postgraduate academic qualifications, four had their matriculation certificate, and one respondent did not provide this information in his self-administered questionnaire. In terms of their relationship status, five were in long-term relationships, three were single and four of the respondents had opted for marriage after the legalisation of same-sex unions in South Africa in 2006 (*cf* De Vos 2008). The gay men's affiliation as father came to the fore most predominantly because of previous heterosexual marriages (in eleven of the cases), with only one respondent, Patrick, having never been married or never having had children. He does, however, occupy the position of stepfather to his husband's[6] children, although he has not opted for legal adoption.

6 The names included in sections 4 and 5 for the respondents are all fictitious to

4. Findings and discussion

The findings in this section will be grouped into four sections. These will include the gay men's definition of the concept fathering, their reasons for becoming fathers, factors that influenced their level of involvement and possible positive influences and obstacles associated with gay fathering.

4.1 Defining the concept 'fathering'

Six respondents used the concept support, four referred to a loving figure, whereas three respondents highlighted the importance of providing for the needs of the child, whether economic or emotional (with the latter outweighing the first). In addition, respondents also noted the necessity of taking responsibility for the child's well-being, which differed somewhat from earlier studies which predominantly and somewhat exclusively emphasised the importance ascribed to the role of father as breadwinner as primary role.[7] Other definitions associated with fathering included the development of the child's talents and autonomy, sharing insight, serving as educator and being unbiased and caring. Added to this were views of the father as leader, protector, moral figure and friend which supported the work done by Brotherson (2007a: 116) and Pleban & Diez (2007).

In addition, the men also expressed their disillusionment with the fact that many regard the concepts "gay" and "father" as contradictory, as was evident from previous studies undertaken on the binary relationship.[8] Robert, for example, noted that because he was involved within this relationship with his child, he finds it difficult to comprehend any other reality. "We're also only human", Gene argued, while Matthew believed himself and other gay fathers to be even better parents than their heterosexual counterparts. He at-

ensure the anonymity of the men.

7 *Cf* Chapman 2004: 55, Halford 2006: 386, Lamb 1995: 20, McBride 1989: 15, Pruett 2000.

8 *Cf* Baptiste 1987, Berkowitz & Marsiglio 2007, Bigner & Jacobsen 1989b, Bozett 1988, Bradley 2007, Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht 1993: 257, Patterson 2000, Taylor 1997.

tributed this to the fact that gay fathers have to overcompensate for being different, in view of the constant "spotlight" that monitors their every move, a thought related to Downs' (2006: 75) reference to gay men's need to compensate for their so-called "deviance". This positions the fathers in a spectrum of increased and more meaningful involvement with their children. On the other side of the continuum, Anthony believes that one should also acknowledge the relativity of the meanings associated with the gay lifestyle. It is, according to him, the responsibility of the gay parent to lead his or her life in such a way as to prove to the heterosexual community that "we are just like you".

But why then, with the constant scrutiny and possible discrimination and degradation, do gay men want to be fathers?

4.2 Reasons for becoming a father

Four of the men cited the so-called in-born desire to father a child, with three communicating the manner in which being a father adds meaning to one's life, as highlighted in the findings of Bigner & Bozett (1990) who commented on the joy, value and psychological well-being children may bring to the lives of fathers. This leads to, as one respondent put it, the creation of an intergenerational link between father and child, a thought which is, according to several theorists (*cf* Brotherson 2007a, Dollahite *et al* 1997, Hawkins & Dollahite 1997), enmeshed within the theory on generativity. Gene argued that the "child loves you for who you are", there are no additional expectations, only unconditional acceptance and love. Others wanted to be fathers because it would ensure that someone would inherit their worldly possessions, whereas another expressed the hope that it would re-establish and strengthen his relationship with his own father, which concurs with views held by Bigner & Jacobsen (1989a) and Brotherson (2007). The impact of societal pressure also found consonance in the reasons given. In this instance two respondents mentioned that they had a child because it was the logical next step in the cycle of their previous heterosexual relationships – you fall in love, get married and have a child. Matthew believed that society

dictates this social responsibility in order for an individual to be regarded as normal (Bigner & Bozett 1990).

4.3 Factors that impacted on the level of fathering involvement

These factors, associated with those discussed in the literature section, include motivation, skills and self-confidence, institutional practices, support and the disclosure of the father's sexual orientation.

4.3.1 Motivation

Five gay fathers indicated that they do not need any form of motivation to participate in the lives of their children. As Daniel wholeheartedly put it, "I don't need to be coerced", whereas Clive felt that he was of the "same fibres" as his children.

Related to the discussion on motivation, the men also provided insight into their relationship with their own fathers. Their feedback encompasses four sections, based on the contributions of Lamb (1997). The first focused on whether they remained close to their father; secondly, whether they modelled their fathers' behaviour or attempted to (over)compensate for it; thirdly, a reflection on specific instances or memories that impacted on them, as well as the effect of the impact, and finally whether their fathers' treatment of their grandchildren differed from the way in which they (the gay men) were raised.

First, eight respondents noted that they had remained close to their father based on his parenting practices, whereas the remaining three provided the counter argument. Two of the men who reflected on the positive relationship with their father mentioned that their father's desire to establish a more meaningful connection with them only came to the fore later in his life.

Secondly, views of five respondents corresponded with previous studies (*cf* Brotherson 2007b: 399, LaRossa 1988: 451, Snarey 1993: 304) on opting to model the behaviour of one's own father in terms of parenting. The respondents attributed their decision to the fact that they had learned a lot from their father, and that he had provided

them with the necessary moral standards and family values for their own familial lives. Hugh, however, noted that although he too ascribes to some of these values, he acknowledges that it might be a mistake to simply mirror another parent's behaviour, rather than constructing your own system. Those who sought to compensate (*cf* Lamb 1997: 6, Pleck 1997: 80, Snarey 1993: 204) for their father's lack of parenting cited several reasons. These included that they wanted to be better fathers by rectifying their father's wrongs and substituting them with new values, including more freedom, emphasis on earned respect rather than forced respect, less physical punishment, more overt displays of emotion and affection, listening more attentively and advising them accordingly.

Thirdly, the researcher found that there were specific instances or memories which these men associated with their fathers. On the negative side, respondents recalled instances of alcoholism, abuse, constant irritation, humiliation and selfishness on their father's part. Such memories led Clive to remark that he "hated" his father and "rejected him in my head" while growing up. "One time I was so scared of him, that I hid in the washing machine so that he wouldn't find me". Other evidence of such a negative impact was also provided in Gene's remark that he has since childhood not been able to love and trust other human beings, and is in fact afraid of "needing someone". On the positive side, other respondents remembered a good relationship with their fathers, characterised by a loving, gentle, responsible, fair and intellectually stimulating bond.

Finally, the question that dealt with the possible differences or similarities in terms of the way in which grandfathers treat their grandchildren, in relation to the way in which they had raised their own sons, presented the following results. Some of the respondents, who displayed a negative inclination towards their own fathers, cited a lack of contact between their children and their grandfathers (in one instance as little as three to four hours in a few months). One argued that his daughter did not want to spend time with her grandfather because he scared her; another respondent stated that his father knows about his grandchildren, but has never attempted to meet them. Those who painted a picture of the "traditional grandfather"

described him as being "more gentle and affectionate with them than he was with me", more patient, "a real granddad" and consistent with the good, "soft" manner in which he raised his own child.

4.3.2 Skills and self-confidence

Related to skills, four respondents noted that their abilities to parent came naturally, "from within", something that just "has to be there from the start". The importance of conversing with other parents, attending seminars and consulting literature on parenting, as stressed by Barclay & Lupton (1999: 1019), Brotherson (2007b) and Lamb (1997: 7), found representation in the feedback from respondents. The fathers argued that they developed their skills through such initiatives. Anthony, however, noted that "new rules develop that 'drive you' to be more involved as your child grows older".

In terms of self-esteem, one respondent believed that being a father made him feel more "like a man", and in effect overshadowed his guilt for being attracted to men. Matthew said that his role as good father increases his self-esteem insofar as it affords him the validation of his children who regard him and his husband as "cool dads".

4.3.3 Institutional practices

The careers of six of the respondents did not impact on their relationship with their children. This was attributed to the fact that a career provided, as in the case of one respondent, the necessary financial means to support his children, which correlated with work done by Coltrane (1995: 266) and Newman (1999: 216). The flexible working arrangements of two other respondents related to studies on the subject matter (Cook 1992: 206, Sekaran 1986: 128). This is attributed to their adoption of the flexi-time working arrangement (both being self-employed) and another father's employer's leniency when it came to the needs of his employees' children.

Adrian, Clive and Robert took a different stance. Adrian's working hours do not afford him the opportunity to spend as much time with his daughter as he wants to. Clive referenced his position as pastor as a limiting factor in his relationship with his daughter, based

on an unceasingly difficult inner struggle, resulting in his ex-wife being "more hands-on" with the child. Robert recalled giving up on his own career prospects and "settling down" for the sake of his children.

4.3.4 Support

Three support networks were identified: the ex-wife, the current partner or husband and the broader community (family, friends and colleagues).

With respect to their ex-wives, two gay men, Gene and Robert, provided negative accounts of the manner in which their wives limited their interaction with their children. This mirrored the findings of research which indicated that it was especially the (ex)-wives of gay men who suffered the most after their husbands' disclosure of their sexual orientation (*cf* Barret & Robinson 2000: 136, Gochros 1989: 84). Gene recalled that his wife had prohibited his participation with their child for the first five to six years of the child's life, whereas an earlier account of the legal battles and one-sided accusations between Robert and his ex-wife serves as proof of a lack of support and understanding.

On the other side of the spectrum, studies which underscored reciprocal support between the estranged couple (*cf* Edwards *et al* 1992: 59, Greenstein 1990: 657) found resonance in the views of several respondents. Hugh indicated that his wife had never prohibited him from interacting with his children, but rather encouraged his so-called "paternal instinct". This thought was echoed in the words of Clive who expressed a great deal of appreciation for having had the opportunity to play a primary role after the birth of his daughter, since his wife had to work and he was a full-time theology student. Seven respondents regarded this relationship as important, as they believe that a child should have both a mother and a father, in whatever configuration. Such a configuration may, according to one respondent, take the form of female friends or family members of two gay men, who should still occupy male roles. This argument is echoed by Gene and Robert who refer to the role of "modelling" one's behaviour based on one's parents.

As evident in the work of Garner (2005), Patterson (2000) and Patterson & Chan (1997), support from the gay men's current partners or husbands was deemed far more imperative than that of the ex-wives. Eight of the respondents emphasised the importance of teamwork between the two gay men, rather than adhering to gender-specific roles in their endeavour to parent adequately. "We do what is necessary, regardless of our sex or sexual orientation", Hugh remarked. The role of parent rather than the specific gender roles should be emphasised, according to Anthony. The men perform activities based on their strengths and do not act as either a man or a woman, but as a father, although some effeminate subtleties may arise. Such support was evident in the accounts of ten respondents. In this regard, Clive argued that his partner's support of his daughter "affirms" her importance in their lives. Although not having formally adopted Matthew's children, Patrick reinforces Clive's notion when stating: "I am very blessed to have been given the opportunity to be more involved with the children, they are my babies".

Views on the support of the broader community mainly centred on the gay men's parents, siblings and friends. In this instance Clive and Gene referred to the positive affirmations their close friends and family members made towards them. What was evident, however, was the fact that they ascribed to an individual approach in terms of their relationship with their children. Those who did not support them, for example Clive's in-laws, played a minimal if any role. Matthew's father aligned his notions with those of Clive's in-laws, because he thought his son's position as father was "not healthy", leading to Matthew and Patrick working extremely hard to contradict the broader society's misinterpretation of them.

Although Daniel and John did not regard the support from the heterosexual community as important, six of the respondents believed that support was imperative, especially on a professional level, in terms of counselling, psychological services and workshops. This would assist, lead and "coax" gay fathers towards improved fathering practices, which explains an initiative such as the support groups recommended by Canfield (2007: 385). In addition, support may also alleviate and remove several misconceptions and myths

held about homosexuality, such as the sex-fiend myth, according to Hugh. For, as Matthew noted, "There are good and bad boys in the gay community".

In deciding whether to reveal or bury the truth about their sexual orientation, gay fathers provided different insights.

4.3.5 The disclosure of the gay father's sexual orientation

Asked whether their sexual orientation had been revealed (or whether they were planning to reveal it) to their children, nine respondents acknowledged that their children knew. Reasons for this ranged from Bozett's (1984) reference to establishing a truthful relationship without secrecy with the child, to the creation of a bond based on reciprocal respect. Five of these men did not tell the children directly because they felt somewhat shameful about it, on the one hand, whereas the children heard accounts from family members and friends, on the other. In two of these cases, other family members had told the children in an attempt to humiliate and discredit the gay father. Despite this, these fathers still managed to establish a trusting and accepting relationship with their children. The remaining three respondents described their disclosure on a gradual basis to avoid any unnecessary ambiguity and pain, as recommended by Miller (1987) and Schulenberg (1985). The other three fathers opted to abstain from telling their children as they wanted to protect their own privacy, and felt that their sexual lives, just as that of their children, did not concern anyone else. In the cases of Adrian and Liam, their children are still too young (three and nine years old, respectively) to fully comprehend the situation.

The researcher also considered the manner in which these gay men would react if their children were also gay. Ten of the twelve respondents unanimously agreed that they did not want their children to be gay for a variety of reasons, whereas the other two believed that it was their children's own choice. They attributed their views to the fact that it was a very difficult life to lead based on the norm of heterosexuality, that "being different was still very difficult", and in the case of two respondents, they still cherished the hope that

they would one day be able to change their sexual orientation to that of heterosexuality. Regardless of such views, they noted that they would accept, guide, support and love their children through such a life.

Finally, based on the foregoing discussion of these factors, gay men also reflected on the manner in which their roles as fathers benefit their children, regardless of several obstacles they have to face.

4.4 Positive influences and obstacles associated with gay fathering

A gay father's ability to emphasise a greater deal of acceptance and/or tolerance for diversity (in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and race), as stressed in several studies came to the fore during the study.[9] This was complemented by the importance ascribed to a more open relationship with the children in terms of communication as well as a higher degree of sensitivity and emotional involvement with their children, courtesy of the work of Johnson & O'Connor (2002). In addition, a more open *relationship as it relates to questions and issues concerning sex and sexual orientation* as well as a better insight into the complexities of life, based on the adversity they themselves had to face, were also listed as positive influences. Finally, a greater degree of support for their children through possible adversity also figured as positive affirmations in terms of their parenting skills.

By contrast, the respondents outlined several obstacles associated with their roles as gay fathers. Discrimination and subsequent shame for both the fathers and their children, based on several myths, as outlined by Meezan & Rauch (2005), were heralded. In addition, stereotypes held about gay men in general, such as equating homosexuality with cross-dressing or labelling all gay men as so-called "screaming queens", complemented Barret & Robinson's (2000) research on the issue. Avoiding open invitations to their children's school friends to spend an evening or weekend at their home to steer

9 *Cf* Allen 1997: 197, Bozett 1987b, Garner 2005, Johnson & O'Connor 2002, Meezan & Rauch 2005, Voeller & Walters 1978.

clear of unnecessary innuendos was also raised as an obstacle faced by gay fathers. These children experience a great deal of distress because of this, a thought highlighted in the work of Meezan & Rauch (2005) on such fears displayed by gay parents and their children.

Possible problems associated with meeting a future husband or wife of their children based on prejudiced notions and stereotypes, as well as institutionalised prejudice in the school system, exacerbate problems which correlate with gay parenting. Related to the latter, Matthew remarked:

> We [...] had an experience at a private Christian school. [...] The principal came chasing after us when he found out that we were a gay couple. He said that they would propagate the Christian value of heterosexuality and the unacceptability of homosexuality. [...] Needless to say, we didn't enrol our kids there" (Stanton & Maier 2005).

This could relate to Goffman's reference to the so-called "with" relationship, as applied to the relationship between father and child. Individuals who ascribe to the main arguments of this relationship basically assume that one will adopt and reflect the features (as in this case, sexual orientation) of the person with whom one associates oneself with. This corresponds with studies (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht 1993) which reference the child's personal fears of being (or becoming) gay or lesbian themselves. Based on discrimination that may ensue, gay fathers expressed similar fears of respondents who partook in the research of Bozett (1987b), who fear that the child will alienate his father based on the prejudice s/he has to face in society. Finally, in an attempt to avoid such drastic measures, overcompensation in parenting practices, based on the intense scrutiny from the heterosexual community, may place intense financial and emotional pressure on the fathers, a feature associated with gay men in general, according to Downs (2006: 76).

In terms of the latter obstacle, a shift in roles for the father following the heterosexual divorce, from father-figure and disciplinarian to "nice dad" or entertainer, due to the fact that he wants to alleviate any additional hardship for the child, supports the conclusions of Cottle

& Dixon (2007: 254) and Pruett (2000: 116). These theorists argue that men are often more likely to engage in activities that promote a "hosting" or "playful" role characterised by a sense of guilt towards the child and competition with the spouse to spend more time with them, rather than that of caring parenting practices. Such fathers are typified as so-called "Disneyland dads." Studies on the importance of role modelling during the socialisation process of children (Hall & Tift 2007) also figured in problems faced by gay fathers. This related to, among others, the lack of a mother figure, father figure or attempts to educate the children on how to interact with and treat other men and women (differentially), how to be a parent to their own children, and how to establish and maintain their own family life.

5. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion sought to describe the tumultuous relationship between homosexuality and fathering against the background of the principles associated with generativity. Two conclusions were particularly evident.

First, a number of independent factors were in fact associated with the levels of fathering involvement. Significant influences were found to be associated with the factors of motivation, skills and self-confidence, and support structures.

In terms of the discussion of motivation and, in particular, the developmental history of the men, it was evident that men who lacked involved and nurturing care from their own fathers as children sought to compensate for their fathers' wrongs. Others, who cited the positive influences of their fathers, attempted to model the principles (and even improve on them) of their fathers. It should be noted, however, that regardless of whether they modelled or compensated for their fathers' mistakes, both groupings attempted to redefine their fathering work to establish a more nurturing parenting context. Courtesy of Lamb's (1997) and Smit's (2008) previous studies, the findings were again reiterated with respect to the educational and occupational levels of respondents. The researcher

found that those fathers who had postgraduate degrees and who were either teachers or lecturers displayed high levels of paternal involvement. Associated with their gender role orientation, gay fathers displayed an affinity for a more androgynous and egalitarian approach to the parenting practices. As such, they eradicated the so-called gender hierarchies discussed in the work of Delphy (2002) and binary categories (Bradley 2007) which dictated what masculinity or femininity (*cf* Connell 2005, Walby 1990) entailed, and what the exclusive tasks of fathers and mothers should be. They opted for the negotiation of the allocation of household tasks for the couple, based on their strengths and mutual support, rather than the gender of the individual, which reflects similar findings in previous research.[10] No significant differences or trends were found pertaining to other biographical variables associated with the respondents, including their respective ages. This could be attributed to the fact that respondents unanimously emphasised external factors that influenced the gay father and his relationship with his children, induced by the heterosexual and childless gay communities, rather than internal dynamics of the father-child relationship. In addition, regardless of the age ranges from 30 to 70, gay fathers' reflections were based on their initial and immediate experiences of parenting, rather than later reflections (as may be the case of fathers with older and/or adult children).

Skills were also regarded as necessary to ensure "effective" fathering, as noted by one respondent. Some were of the opinion that skills were a "natural process" that comes "from within", whereas others believed that increased emphasis should be placed on parenting courses, seminars and reading materials to aid the father in his task. Three support structures were evident in the feedback of respondents. These included the ex-wives, the gay men's husbands or life-partners, and the broader heterosexual and gay communities. The support of ex-wives and husbands or life-partners was considered imperative. This was ascribed to the importance of "teamwork", a "joint vision" and the encouragement of the "paternal instinct" of the father, rather than merely underscoring the aforementioned

10 *Cf* Aldous *et al* 1998: 810, Coltrane 1995: 266, Johnson 2009, Russell 1983.

traditional gender ideals. Support from professional structures within the heterosexual community was welcomed by gay fathers, who thought that such support would assist and "coax" them towards improved paternity.

Finally, based on these findings, the researcher believes that a distinction should rather be established between the lives of "gay fathers" and the apparent stereotypical "nature of the gay lifestyle". Such a belief was emphasised by the feedback of one respondent and the behaviour of another. The first came courtesy of a respondent who referred to the "dark side" of the gay community where gay men act like "animals", in terms of sexual perversions and the exclusion of those who do not conform to such expectations. The second was the unfortunate occurrence of sexual advances made towards the researcher by a gay man directly following the interview on his relationship with his child. Because of this, the researcher believes that a gay father should establish a novel and pure model for gay parenting, rather than conforming to the stereotypical conceptualisations of what it means to be gay (as was evident in the foregoing two occurrences). In achieving this, the polarisation between "gay/homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" may either be reduced or eradicated, due to the fact that several individuals in each of the distinct communities share values and principles that complement proactive parenting.

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