

**Volunteer single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who  
become single parents by choice**

By

**Maria Catherina le Roux**

2020047243

**Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Social Science in Clinical Psychology**

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**Department of Psychology**

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at the

**University of the Free State**

**Bloemfontein**

**Supervisor: Dr L Nel**

**March 2024**

### Declaration

I, Maria Catherina le Roux, hereby declare that the research title is a result of my own work, unless otherwise stated. I have provided full acknowledgement of the sources referred to in the text. This study has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.



25 March 2024

Maria Catherina le Roux

Date

Student number 2020047243

### Permission to Submit

I, as the supervisor of the study, hereby confirm that the mini-dissertation titled, "Volunteer single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice", which was completed by Maria Catherina le Roux, accurately reflects the research regarding the topic. I herein grant permission that she may submit the research paper for examination purposes. I further confirm that the mini-dissertation submitted is in partial fulfilment of the prerequisites for the degree Master of Social Science in Clinical Psychology at the Bloemfontein Campus of the University of the Free State. The article may be submitted to the Journal of Family Studies for publication purposes.



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Dr L Nel

Research Supervisor

25 March 2024

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Date

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- Zain, as always.
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### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my other father, oom Pieter van der Westhuizen. It was a privilege to be your daughter. You always believed in me, and I wish you were here to see me achieve this goal.

I miss you every day.

## Preface

The mini-dissertation consists of three sections:

- Section A: Overview of the study
- Section B: Manuscript to be submitted to the *Journal of Family Studies*.

The manuscript comprises the research questions, the research objectives, the methodology, results and conclusion. The technical and referencing style of the dissertation will remain consistent throughout this mini-dissertation. The manuscript will be amended for journal publication after feedback is received from the examiners.

- Section C: This section presents the conclusions, contributions, limitations, and recommendations, in addition to a personal reflection.
- Please note that due to the article format that is followed by the University of the Free State, there may be some duplication across the three sections. Each section will have its own reference list. A consolidated reference list can be found at the end of Section C, followed by the appendices, which are cross-referenced throughout this dissertation.

## Editor Declaration

**CARINE JANSE VAN RENSBURG**

**Taalpraktisyn en onderwyskundige/Language Practitioner and Educationist**

BA (Hons); MA; HOD; SAVI-geakkrediteer

BA (Hons); MA; HDE; SATI Accredited

E-pos/Email: [carinej@mweb.co.za](mailto:carinej@mweb.co.za) ▪ Selfoon/Cell: 082 871 3474

56 Longlands 56

Stellenbosch

7600

---

25 March 2024

To whom it may concern

I, Carine Janse van Rensburg, hereby declare that I edited the following thesis:

**Volunteer single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice**

by Maria Catherina le Roux

Grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and phrasing was corrected, where necessary.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CJR', on a light-colored background.

Carine Janse van Rensburg

## Abstract

Since the development and increased accessibility of assisted reproductive technology, there has been a rise in alternative family forms since the end of the twentieth century. However, marital heteronormative parenthood and the nuclear family ideal remain salient, often leading to stigmatisation of alternative family forms. Volunteer single fathering represents one such alternative family form, where men choose to become single fathers via surrogacy or adoption and are the sole primary caregivers of their children. The limited research available on this specific family type is situated in the global north, and there is a need to provide contextual knowledge of this family form in the South African context. The motivations of five South African men who chose to become VSFs via surrogacy or adoption were explored, utilising a multiple-case study design. Thematic analysis of the participants' accounts delivered four themes, namely: *Seeking meaning and purpose*; *Capabilities of single fathers*; *Pathways towards volunteer single fathering*; and *Advocacy for myself and those to follow*. The intentionality of the participants to decide to become VSFs was looked at from a Self-Determination Theoretical stance, specifically the Theory of Basic Psychological Needs. This study is the first to focus on VSFs in South Africa and serves as a foundation to broaden our knowledge and address the dearth in South African fatherhood literature on this unique family type.

*Keywords:* Volunteer single fathers, Self-Determination Theory, surrogacy, adoption, South Africa, contesting gender roles

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## **Section A: Study overview**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In Section A, an overview of the study will be provided. First, a review of the relevant literature will be given, including a discussion of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and, specifically, the Theory of Basic Psychological Needs (TBPN), which serves as the theoretical underpinning of the study. Next the aims and objections of the study will be stated. This will be followed by a detailed description of the methodology implemented to obtain data, the process of analysing the qualitative data collected, as well as an outline of the themes identified. A discussion on ensuring trustworthiness of the data as well as researcher reflexivity is then provided. Lastly, the ethical considerations that were undertaken during the study will be offered.

### **1.2 Literature review**

Literature on the various topics relevant to the current study will be discussed in this review. An overview of the literature on voluntary single fathering will be followed by a discussion of extant literature on single fathers in South Africa. Next, the motivations to become a parent through adoption and surrogacy will be discussed, followed by a description of adoption and surrogacy processes in South Africa. The way volunteer single fathering challenges traditional gender roles will then be argued. Lastly, an outline of the TBPN encompassed in the SDT framework proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000) will be given.

#### **1.2.1 *Voluntary single fathering***

The idea of the nuclear family unit consisting of two parents, male and female, and their biological children, is a Western family ideal that became the norm globally after industrialisation and colonisation (Lamb, 2000). Although marital heteronormative parenthood is still regarded as the ideal in mainstream thought, there has been a rise in alternative family forms over the last three decades (Maya & Adital, 2018). This increase in “postmodern family forms” (Johnson, 2017, p. 387) has been attributed to the development of assisted reproductive technologies

(ART), such as *in vitro* fertilisation, egg donation, and gestational surrogacy (Johnson, 2017).

The frequent use and easier access to these technologies have led to more societal acceptance of these avenues to parenthood, in turn leading to an acceptance of alternative family forms (Maya & Adital, 2018), such as families with same-sex parents, single mothers by choice and voluntary single fathering (Johnson, 2017).

It has been widely reported that the number of single-father households increased rapidly since the 1970s in the United States, corresponding with an increase in research on single fathers (Coles, 2015). Most research on single fathers as primary caregivers has focused on child outcomes or compared the experiences of single fathers to that of single mothers (e.g., Coles, 2002, 2015; Steffens et al., 2019). These studies mostly focused on men who were the sole primary caregivers of their children, either after their spouse passed away or their relationship ended (Arboleda & Singson, 2022).

Voluntary single fathers (VSFs), however, are a specific group within the population of single fathers who are “heterosexual, gay, or bisexual men who actively elect to parent alone through adoption or surrogacy” (Carone et al., 2020, p. 2). The important distinguishing feature of this group is that they choose to become single parents, making a conscious decision to become a father via adoption or surrogacy, without a partner (Maya & Adital, 2018). Choosing to become single fathers and primary caregivers shows the intentionality of these men to be fathers (Carone et al., 2020). They did not become a father and primary caregiver due to the ending of a relationship, but actively sought to be a single parent (Johnson, 2017). Most of the extant literature on VSFs is situated within the context of gay men who chose adoption or surrogacy to become single fathers.

Carroll (2018) looked at the different minority groups within a group of gay<sup>1</sup> fathers, such as single gay fathers, gay fathers of colour, and gay fathers who had children in heterosexual contexts. Participant observation during support groups, as well as semi-structured qualitative interviews, showed that these minority groups were marginalised within the greater population of gay fathers and had to develop resilience in response to the stigma they faced (Carroll, 2018). The resilience of the single gay fathers was around being proud of their accomplishments and celebrating their ability to be sole primary caregivers, as well as cherishing the close bond they had with their children (Carroll, 2018). Carroll (2018) also found that some single gay fathers by choice were advocating for visibility, voicing frustration that the public was not aware that adoption by single parents is an option.

Carone et al. (2017; 2020) conducted two qualitative studies set in Italy as part of a more extensive study focused solely on VSFs who chose surrogacy to become fathers. The participants included men who identified as gay or heterosexual. The first study looked at the motivations of the VSFs, asking why these men decided to become single fathers via surrogacy (Carone et al., 2017). Four main themes were identified from the semi-structured interviews conducted. The first theme related to timing, that the VSFs felt it was the right time to become fathers (Carone et al., 2017). In the second theme, the men reported that they were encouraged by family and friends, indicating that they had social support and were viewed as capable of being sole primary caregivers (Carone et al., 2017). The third theme highlighted that the men desired to reproduce, to have “a child of my own” (Carone et al., 2017, p. 1876). And lastly, some of the fathers expressed concern about future separation when becoming a parent within the context of a relationship, with some of the heterosexual fathers expressing concern over custody of their children being granted to the mother (Carone et al., 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> The term “gay” is used as opposed to “homosexual” since most of the literature reviewed uses this term.

The other Italian study investigated whether microaggressions and fathers' rumination may impact father-child relationships (Carone et al., 2020). Their research question implies that the participants were faced with stigma due to the contested aspects of their alternative family formation, namely being single parents, choosing surrogacy as their pathway to parenthood, and, for some participants, being single gay fathers (Carone et al., 2020). The authors found that the subtle and ambiguous forms of prejudice experienced by these men were just as detrimental as explicit and overt stigmatisation, which increased their tendency to ruminate in response to the stress they experienced. This brooding was linked to lower sensitivity towards their children, but did not affect their rough-and-tumble play, used to bond with their children (Carone et al., 2020).

Another study focused on VSFs was conducted by Maya and Adital (2018), who looked at the experiences of Israeli single gay fathers via surrogacy. In this qualitative study, the single fathers reported experiencing social viewpoints that their families were inherently deficient, which led to them feeling estranged, vulnerable, and marginalised (Maya & Adital, 2018). However, the multiple marginalities they faced led to an increase in resilience. They viewed themselves as “empowered, independent, self-sufficient men who are not afraid to criticise the heteronormative model of parenthood as related to couple hood” (Maya & Adital, 2018, p. 7). The authors highlighted that having a choice to become a single parent enhanced autonomy and fostered resilience.

In a recent occasional essay by Pereira and Beatriz (2023), the phenomenon of single-father families via surrogacy was discussed. The authors set out to promote the social visibility of these VSFs to offer positive models for men considering surrogacy as a route to parenthood (Pereira & Beatriz, 2023). They reported that VSFs were often marginalised due to social norms based on heteronormativity and gender hegemony. Despite these challenges, VSFs were motivated to pursue their wish to become parents, and mostly chose surrogacy because they preferred to have a genetic relation to their child (Pereira & Beatriz, 2023). According to Pereira

and Beatriz (2023), research shows that all involved in the surrogacy process (intended father, surrogate, and child) benefit from the experience and that children from single-father families function well. It was reported that the availability of surrogacy as a pathway to parenthood for single men must be promoted, as the family form of VSFs may facilitate the deconstruction of traditional gender ideology, which informs the hegemonic family structure of heteronormative nuclear families (Pereira & Beatriz, 2023).

Apart from surrogacy, adoption is another route men can choose to become VSFs. In the past, some adoption agencies refused single adults who wanted to adopt a child (Seeman, 2018). This is still the case in many jurisdictions, and it has been reported that even when adoption is a legal choice for single adults to become parents, it seems to be a much more complicated process than for couples (Seeman, 2018). Seeman (2018) conducted a literature review on the topic of single heterosexual men seeking adoption. The motives identified for single men to adopt children were a sense of duty and responsibility, where the men said they wanted to make up for the absence of their fathers, and they wanted to “model high quality fatherhood for their children” (Seeman, 2018, p. 84). It was further reported that mental health professionals were ambivalent regarding single men as adoptive parents (Seeman, 2018). Social workers and adoption agencies marginalised single men as potential foster carers as they are thought to have a higher risk of harming children in their care due to improper allegations of sexual abuse. However, there is also a need for male foster carers, as there is a high rate of father absence (Seeman, 2018). This has led to an increase in single men becoming foster carers and adopting children. Another important finding from Seeman’s (2018) literature review is that men on their own can give adequate care to their adopted children, but due to continued discrimination by mental health professionals, social workers and adoption agencies, more support and training is needed.

In a literature search on the databases of Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, APA PsycArticles, and Sabinet African Journals, using the key words “volunteer single

fathering”, “volunteer single fathers”, “single fathers by choice” and “South Africa”, no South African studies were found that focused specifically on VSFs, i.e., where a man chooses to adopt a child or chooses surrogacy as a pathway to becoming a single father.

### **1.2.2 *Single fathers in South Africa***

In the South African context, there are many diverse family forms due to an interplay of various social, historical, political, and economic factors (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2010). The number of single-father families in South Africa has also increased, with 3,7% of households headed by single fathers (StatsSA, 2023). However, it is unknown how these fathers came to be primary caregivers. Most South African literature on single parenthood focuses on single mothers and their experiences and challenges as single parents (Langa & Goldschmidt, 2021).

A literature search on Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, APA PsycArticles, and Sabinet African Journals using the keywords “single fathers” and “South Africa” illustrated the gap in literature on single fathers in South Africa. Very few studies have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals, and only two master’s dissertations forming part of counselling psychology degrees and three master’s dissertations forming part of degrees in social work were found. Three studies published in peer-reviewed journals are discussed below.

Modise (2015) conducted a qualitative study to assess the resources needed by South African single parents as primary caregivers. Out of the 40 single parents, 12 were male. Data from the semi-structured individual interviews indicated that the participants needed material support, as well as training in time management skills and relationship and social-emotional support (Modise, 2015). It was suggested that a holistic approach is necessary to address both the material and socio-relational support needs of the single parents who participated in the study (Modise, 2015).

Another qualitative study by Mudau et al. (2018) explored the experiences of five single South African mothers and five single South African fathers raising teenagers in the Vhembe district in Limpopo. The aim of the study was to focus on how these single parents cope with

raising teenagers, who are often defiant during the adolescent developmental stage. The findings showed that these single parents struggle to raise their teenagers on their own, often due to limited financial resources (Mudau et al., 2018). It was further found that these single parents had unhealthy relationships with their children, that the adolescents performed poorly at school, and that many of their children are using substances (Mudau et al., 2018). Many of the parents reported experiencing stress and having a depressed mood, and recommendations were made to encourage the single parents to seek counselling (Mudau et al., 2018). These findings indicate the vulnerability single parents may have to developing mental health problems.

A recent study by Kabongo and Malose (2023) set out to bridge the gap in South African literature on single fathers, exploring the experiences of parenthood of Black single fathers living in Johannesburg. In this qualitative study, seven single fathers who were the primary caregivers of their children were interviewed (Kabongo & Malose, 2023). Three of the participants became the primary caregivers of their children after their wives passed away, and the other four became primary caregivers after the dissolution of their relationships with their children's mothers (Kabongo & Malose, 2023). Two main themes emerged from the thematic analysis, namely 'Parenting as a single father' and 'Life beyond single fatherhood' (Kabongo & Malose, 2023). As part of the first theme, participants reported wanting to compensate for their own experiences of having an absent biological father, the differences between parenting boy-children versus girl-children and reflected on the importance of their support systems (Kabongo & Malose, 2023).

Although it is known that there are single men in South Africa who choose to become parents via adoption (Price, 2021) or surrogacy (Ndongeni-Ntlebi, 2021), there is limited research on this family form with most of the literature focusing on single parenthood in general.

### **1.2.3 Motivation to become a parent via adoption or surrogacy**

The decision to become a parent is influenced by many factors (Ross-Plourde & Basque, 2019). Choosing to become a parent through adoption or surrogacy involves complexities of interrelated and overlapping motivations, which interact dynamically with barriers associated with these processes (Blake et al., 2017; Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

Existing research on parents' motivations to adopt or to engage in foster care provides different classifications or categories of motivations (e.g., Coles, 2015; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Sorek et al., 2020). In general, these motivations are categorised into three groups: child-centred motivations, parent-centred motivations, and motivations related to the wider society (Sorek et al., 2020). Child-centred motivations refer to the needs of the child, such as providing an adopted child with (presumed) better care and opportunities due to being part of a family. This category is associated with altruistic or moral motivations (Sorek et al., 2020) and may involve moral or religious standards (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). The category of parent-centred motivations is based on how the parent benefits from adopting a child or participating in foster care (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). This category is associated with individual or self-oriented motivations (Luyt & Swartz, 2023) and may stem from intrinsic (seeking meaning in their lives) or extrinsic (anticipated rewards such as growing your family) motivation (Sorek et al., 2020). Infertility or biological barriers to childbearing often play a role in this category of self-oriented motivations (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Lastly, the category related to the broader society refers to motivations such as wanting to give back to the community (Sorek et al., 2020).

In a quantitative study on foster care in Flanders, De Maeyer et al. (2014) looked at the three categories of motivations, mentioned above, among Flemish foster care parents. Of the parents who completed the questionnaires, 78% were foster mothers and 80% were married or living with a partner. It was reported that the most frequently endorsed reasons for engaging in foster care were child-centred reasons, such as providing a good home for a child (De Maeyer et al., 2014). Self-oriented motivations (finding meaning) were the next most common reasons

provided, followed by society-oriented reasons (De Maeyer et al., 2014). They noted that all the respondents' reasons were combinations of the three categories of motivations (De Maeyer et al., 2014).

In an earlier qualitative study looking at the decisions to adopt amongst 15 Finnish adoptive parents, Högbäck (2008) found that motivations appeared to be mostly self-oriented. Seven women, one man, three couples, and four single women were interviewed. Involuntary childlessness was the most common reason given for adopting, such as fertility problems in couples, or single women not finding the right partner or a necessity to be permanently employed when they were younger (Högbäck, 2008). Some couples also reported that they wanted to enlarge their families (Högbäck, 2008). Among all the participants, there was a strong desire to have a child, with parenthood and a family as their goals (Högbäck, 2008). Participants also reported that they wanted to take part in activities of families with young children, and, like the results reported by De Maeyer et al. (2014), the Finnish parents saw parenthood as an opportunity to find meaning in their lives (Högbäck, 2008). Some participants also expressed an element of fate or necessity, stating that they were meant to be their child's parent (Högbäck, 2008).

Goldberg et al. (2012) looked specifically at the motivations of gay male couples who were in the process of adopting their first child. From their qualitative interviews with 35 male couples from different states in North America, the authors noted that the gay couples expressed similar motivators for parenthood as heterosexual couples did in previous research (Goldberg et al., 2012). These included the personal and psychological rewards of parenting and valuing family ties (Goldberg et al., 2012). The participants therefore emphasised family process rather than family structure when reflecting on their ideas of family (Goldberg et al., 2012). The prospective fathers also expressed the notion that having children is a part of life, thus regarding parenthood as part of a developmental stage. The couples also expressed

altruistic motivations like wanting to provide a child with a good home and positioned themselves as capable of doing so (Goldberg et al., 2012).

In another qualitative study, Blake et al. (2017) interviewed gay male couples who chose surrogacy as a pathway to parenthood. A total of 40 families who all resided in the United States of America took part in the study. Most of the fathers stated that they viewed surrogacy as more desirable and accessible than adoption, since they felt they had more control over the process (Blake et al., 2017). The second most common motivation for choosing surrogacy was that the fathers wanted either themselves or their partner to have a genetic connection with their child (Blake et al., 2017). Other reasons given were that the fathers were financially able to go through the surrogacy process, that it was their partner's preference, and that they wanted to be involved in the pregnancy as well as the birth of their child (Blake et al., 2017).

In a South African study on motivations to adopt transracially, parent- and child-centred motivations for adoption were also found, as well as preferential adoption (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). The main motivation for adopting transracially for most of the families was a wish to become parents, which Luyt and Swartz (2023) reported as being a parent-centred motivation. Many participants reported medical barriers to fertility, and some women reported not having access to a male partner, and therefore they chose adoption. Another parent-centred motivation reported was wanting to have a different experience than what they had when parenting their biological children (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). The child-centred motivations reported were wanting to provide care for a specific child in need, altruistic motivation driven by religious conviction, and a humanitarian impulse (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Lastly, some of the parents reported that adoption was their preferred choice to grow their family and that they did not feel the need to be biologically related to their children (Luyt & Swartz, 2023).

## **1.2.4 Adoption and surrogacy in South Africa**

### **1.2.4.1 Adoption**

In the South African context, adoption practices are guided according to Chapters 15 and 16 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Van Der Walt, 2014), the Children's Second Amendment Act 18 of 2016, and the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (Pieterse & Malan, 2023). Adoption is defined as the "placement in permanent care of a person in terms of a court order" (RSA, 2005). It is a complicated process which could take years to complete (Pieterse & Malan, 2023). On the South African Government's website on adopting in South Africa, the steps to adopt a child start with approaching an adoption agency (a state agency or a private agency), where a screening process will take place. If the agency is satisfied with the screening results, the prospective adoptive parent will be added to the Register of Adoptable Children and Adoptive Parents (RACAP) (South African Government, n.d.). After meeting an available child allocated to the potential adoptive parent, a report of the case is sent to the Children's Court to finalise the adoption and issue an adoption order (South African Government, n.d.). The costs associated depend on the adoption agency chosen (South African Government, n.d.).

According to the South African Department of Social Development's Practice Guidelines on National Adoption (PGNA), a child may be adopted by couples, such as a husband and wife, partners in a permanent domestic life partnership, and persons sharing a common household and forming a permanent family unit (RSA, n.d.). Single applicants who may adopt a child include the following:

- a widow, widower, divorced or unmarried person
- a married person whose spouse is the parent of the child
- a person whose permanent domestic life partner is the parent of the child
- a biological father of a child born out of wedlock

- a foster parent of the child
- a family member who has given notice to the clerk of the Children's Court that he or she is interested in adopting the child (RSA, n.d., p. 27-28)

In the PGNA it is emphasised that the adoption process in South Africa is child-centred, aiming to achieve an outcome that is in the child's best interest (RSA, n.d.). The government also gives preference to biological family members to adopt children (Pieterse & Malan, 2023). This may be challenging to persons not biologically related to a child who was in foster care with them and whom they wish to adopt, since the state may give preference to biological kin if any family member comes forward to offer a place for the child (Van Der Walt, 2014).

Public data on adoptions in South Africa is sparse and not easily obtained (Rochat et al., 2016). The only statistics found were on the Newlands Therapy Centre website, which was provided to the website owner via email by the Registrar of Adoptions (Mr Chavalala) on 28 April 2022. Please see Appendix A for data on national adoptions from 2013 to 2021, as retrieved from the Newlands Therapy Centre website (Luyt, n.d.). The total number of adoptions in 2021 was 1245 (Luyt, n.d.). Unrelated adoption, where a child is adopted by someone not previously known and not part of the child's biological family, was the most common type of adoption during this year, with 74% of the total adoptions (Luyt, n.d.). Related adoption, where a child is adopted within their family, was 14%, and adoption by a stepparent was 12%. The highest number of adoptions took place in 2014, with a total of 1435 adoptions recorded (Luyt, n.d.). The rate of adoptions declined to 1262 in 2019 and drastically dropped to 466 in 2020, possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Luyt, n.d.). In 2021 the total number of adoptions rose again to 1245, as mentioned above (Luyt, n.d.). Unfortunately, no data could be found on the number of children adopted by unmarried persons, specifically single fathers.

In the latest Annual report of the Department of Social Development of South Africa, 963 adoptions were registered in 2022 (RSA, 2023). This consisted of 834 national adoptions and

129 intercountry adoptions (RSA, 2023). It is further reported that 187 children and 49 prospective adoptive parents have been registered in the RACAP (RSA, 2023).

One of the largest studies on adoption in South Africa was conducted by Mokomane and Rochat (2012) and Rochat et al. (2016). The practice of adoption in South Africa was outlined and the challenges one encounters during the process were explored (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012; Rochat et al., 2016). In this qualitative study, a national sample of adults without children, biological parents, kin and non-kin fostering parents, and prospective and successful adopters were interviewed. It was found that access to state subsidies offered for fostering was the predominant motivation for offering foster care. Furthermore, the authors reported that the absence of subsidies, poor access to quality adoptive services, and a lack of information about adoption could possibly explain low adoption rates (Rochat et al., 2016).

#### **1.2.4.2 Surrogacy**

Surrogacy refers to the process where a woman (the surrogate) agrees to carry a pregnancy to full term on behalf of another person or couple (Attawet et al., 2024). There are two types of surrogacies, namely gestational and traditional surrogacy (Attawet et al., 2024). In gestational surrogacy, an embryo is created using gametes from intended parents and/or donors, and then implanted into the surrogate's womb (Attawet et al., 2024). The embryo is therefore not genetically linked to the surrogate (Attawet et al., 2024). In traditional surrogacy, the surrogate's egg cell is fertilised with the sperm of the intended father or donor (Attawet et al., 2024). The surrogate is therefore the biological mother of the embryo (Attawet et al., 2024).

Gestational surrogacies are further divided into two categories: altruistic and commercial (Attawet et al., 2024). In an altruistic surrogacy process, the surrogate does not receive any financial compensation apart from the costs related to the pregnancy (Attawet et al., 2024). In commercial surrogacy, however, the surrogate may receive fees beyond the reimbursement of their medical costs (Attawet et al., 2024). Commercial surrogacy is banned in most countries,

including South Africa, but in countries such as the United States, Ukraine, and Russia, it is still legal (Attawet et al., 2024).

The surrogacy process in South Africa is strongly regulated by Chapter 19 of the Children's Act of 2005 (Louw, 2013; RSA, 2005). The main features of the current surrogacy model include the following:

The requirement of a court-sanctioned surrogate motherhood agreement prior to the artificial fertilisation of the surrogate mother; the automatic vesting of legal parenthood in the intending commissioning parents at the subsequent birth of the commissioned child; and the outlawing of commercial surrogacy (Louw, 2013, pp 564-565).

Providing that it is not a traditional surrogacy, the child born from surrogacy will legally be the child of the commissioning parent(s) since birth (Thaldar, 2023). The pre-approval of the surrogacy is deemed to be for the protection of all parties involved, including the child (Thaldar, 2023).

Although it is known in the public domain that there have been South African men who have chosen surrogacy as a pathway for volunteer single fathering, no formal, academic investigations on the topic could be found.

### ***1.2.5 Challenging traditional gender roles through volunteer single fathering***

The concept of "gender" is a social construct shaped by the ideas of appropriate masculine and feminine roles within specific social contexts (Amato, 2018). Similarly, terms such as "father" and "fatherhood" are social constructs with various meanings in different societies (Magaraggia, 2012). Although the term "father" may have different meanings globally, it is implicitly gendered and ascribed as a masculine role (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Steinour, 2018). This gendered assumption of fatherhood as a masculine activity is therefore closely linked with the hegemonic masculinity (HM) ideals within societies (Connell, 2016; Morrell et al., 2013), which in turn influence the expectations of how fathers must behave and how they must not behave (Petts et al., 2018; Shefer et al., 2015). The roles of mothers and

fathers are therefore dictated by societal norms (Makusha et al., 2013) and shaped by the social construction of gender (Amato, 2018; Steinour, 2018).

Valiquette-Tessier et al. (2019) conducted a literature review on the cultural stereotypes associated with motherhood and fatherhood, specifically outside the dominant Western context of North America. They reported a shift in the expectations of fathers to be more nurturing and involved, although the traditional view of fathers being solely financial providers prevailed (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). Furthermore, they found that mothers were seen as primary caregivers responsible for most of the care work in households (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). It has been said that this stereotyping of mothers as more caring may lead to fathers being seen as secondary parents, incapable of providing adequate care and nurturing for their children (Amato, 2018).

However, there is a growth in the literature showing a shift in fatherhood perceptions to include more caring masculinity traits (Elliott, 2016), and more fathers taking on the primary caregiver role (Beglaubter, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018). Beglaubter (2019), Brandth and Kvande (2018) and Lee and Lee (2018) investigated the experiences of stay-at-home-fathers (SAHF) who took on the role of primary caregivers to their children. The American fathers interviewed by Lee and Lee (2018) spoke of being more emotionally attuned to other people in general since becoming their children's primary caregivers and reported finding their caring roles highly satisfying. Beglaubter (2019) interviewed Canadian fathers who were on parental leave and found that they also developed increased emotional bonds with their children. Brandth and Kvande (2018) interviewed Norwegian fathers who were also on parental leave. These fathers reported developing competence in their caring skills, which increased their sense of self-worth (Brandth & Kvande, 2018). They further appreciated offering love and security to their children, giving more than just the traditionally expected financial provision (Brandth & Kvande, 2018). The Canadian fathers similarly reported feeling more accomplished as caregivers after their parental leave (Beglaubter, 2019). In all three studies, the SAHF

embraced the traditionally feminine values of care, reframing care work as a masculine activity, and so contesting traditional gender roles of care and nurturing associated with mothers (Beglaubter, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018).

In the South African context, similar stereotypes of masculinity and femininity mentioned above exist, influencing the societal expectations of the roles of fathers and mothers. Fathers in South Africa are still expected to be the primary breadwinner in the family and must be able to provide financially for the household (Langa, 2010; Locke & Yarwood, 2017; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). This idea stems from HM ideals, as well as the patriarchal religious ideals of Christianity, where the father is the strong disciplinarian and head of the household (Lesch & Adams, 2016). For fathers with little or no income, it is sometimes impossible to fulfil the assigned role of primary provider, and they are consequently shunned by their family and community for being unable to do so (Barthelemy & Coakley, 2017; Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Strier, 2014). Due to the country's political history of segregation and past labour laws, many fathers in low-income groups had to migrate to other areas for employment to provide for the financial needs of their families (Makusha et al., 2012). The physical absence of these fathers contributed to the idea of the distant father and further emphasised the father's role as the financial provider (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016). Therefore, the traditional view of fathers being strong, assertive, and emotionally distant financial providers prevails in many diverse social contexts in South Africa (Lesch & Scheffler, 2016; Patel & Mavungu, 2016; Ratele et al., 2012). However, it has been noted that there is also a change in fathering behaviour to include more nurturing and caring activities (Clark et al., 2015; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Morrell et al., 2016; Ratele et al., 2012).

Morrell and Jewkes (2011) conducted a qualitative investigation on South African men of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds who engage in care work. Similar to the international studies discussed above, these men were found to incorporate caring traits as part of their identities and expressed gender-equitable ideas (Morrell & Jewkes, 2011). Morrell et al.

(2016) further expanded their work in a study on fathers who were primary caregivers of their children. It was reported that these fathers not only provided care and nurturing for their own children but extended their care work beyond their households (Morrell et al., 2016). In another South African study, young fathers from low-income communities were asked about their fathering practices (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). Since these fathers did not have the financial means to provide material support, they valued the nurturing care and emotional support they could offer their children (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). In all three these studies, the authors noted the potential of fatherhood as a site for developing more gender-equitable ideas and incorporating caring and nurturing activities as part of a new masculine identity (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Morrell et al., 2016; Morrell & Jewkes, 2011).

#### **1.2.6 Self-Determination Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Basic Psychological Needs**

When considering the motivational dynamics of any self-determined behaviour such as becoming a single parent, the SDT on psychological needs may be relevant. SDT entails the self-motivation and self-determination that drive people's actions (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and is concerned with the impact of social-contextual factors on the satisfaction of people's basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), there are three psychological needs essential to facilitating growth, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which form the basis of their TBP. Competence refers to a person's ability to deal with experiences in their environment, and autonomy refers to the sense of choice people have to behave in a way they choose to, and relatedness to a person's experience of belonging and connectedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). All three of these needs can be hypothesised to be at play when men make the decision to become a single father.

The SDT has been widely used in research on education, work, health care, sport and exercise, relationships, politics, religion, psychopathology, and psychotherapy, with findings indicating that experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness impact psychological

health and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT has also been used in research on parenting when investigating parents' motivations and the effect of parenting styles on child outcomes (Bouchard et al., 2007; Roman et al., 2015; Ross-Plourde & Basque, 2019; Van Lissa et al., 2019).

In a quantitative study conducted by Bouchard et al. (2007), the motivation for involved fathering of Canadian French-speaking fathers in dual-income families was investigated, utilising an SDT framework. Their results showed that fathers who perceived themselves as confident in their parenting skills had higher motivation for being more involved in their children's lives (Bouchard et al., 2007). Ross-Plourde and Basque (2019) reported similar results in their quantitative study on the relationship between prenatal motivation to have a child and parental satisfaction after the child was born, also conducted in Canada. Results showed that first-time mothers and fathers with higher self-determined motivation to become a parent prenatally felt more satisfied in their parental role when their basic needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness were supported by their partner (Ross-Plourde & Basque, 2019).

In another quantitative study, Van Lissa et al. (2019) looked at the role of fathers' and mothers' parenting on emotion regulation of their adolescents within an SDT framework. This longitudinal study collected data during four annual home visits from 2008 to 2012 with 480 Dutch national adolescents and their parents. Self-reported data from the adolescents and their parents were collected on the adolescents' emotion regulation, perceived parental support, perceived parental behavioural control, and perceived parental psychological control (Van Lissa et al., 2019). It was found that perceived parental support played a role primarily between the adolescents and their mothers, and perceived parental behavioural control played a role between the adolescents and their fathers (Van Lissa et al., 2019). The main conclusion from the data reported by Van Lissa et al. (2019) was that adolescents' emotional regulation benefits most when they experience their parents as supporting their increased need for autonomy by providing support and relinquishing control.

A study conducted in South Africa utilising the SDT framework explored the influence of parenting styles and psychological needs on the life goals and aspirations of adolescents (Roman et al., 2015). In this quantitative study, 853 learners from schools in the Western Cape of South Africa completed questionnaires on parenting styles, psychological needs, their aspirations, and positive and negative affect scales (Roman et al., 2015). Roman et al. (2015) reported that authoritative parenting styles were positively correlated with adolescents' intrinsic motivation and aspirations. Furthermore, like the results reported by Van Lissa et al. (2019), adolescents reported positive effects with authoritative parenting styles where they perceived support for their basic need of autonomy.

Although SDT has been extensively used in research on parenting, it has not yet been used in research specifically on single fathers.

### **1.3 Aims and objectives of the study**

There has been a call for qualitative research to provide more contextual knowledge on family forms and functions among different social contexts in South Africa (Nduna & Khunou, 2018). There are various family structures in South Africa that are different from the normative Western ideal of nuclear families, and these families are often stigmatised in society (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). One such family structure is single fathers who are the primary caregivers of their children. Specifically, men choosing to become single fathers have not been part of research studies in the South African context.

Men as primary caregivers challenge gender stereotypes (Steinour, 2018). It has been argued that fatherhood is a potential site to shift men's perceptions towards more equitable gender ideals (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Pereira & Beatriz, 2023), which is imperative in South Africa with high rates of gender-based violence (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Morrell et al., 2016). Men who choose to become single fathers go against gender stereotypes, and their motivation and determination to intentionally take this step need to be explored. Therefore, this

study was situated within the SDT framework proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000). More specifically, the interpretation of the data was grounded in a sub-theory of SDT, the TBPn.

Given the importance and relevance of this study in the South African context, the aims and objectives were to explore and describe fathers' motivations for becoming VSFs via surrogacy or adoption.

## **1.4 Methodology**

In this section, a brief description of the research process will be provided. The research design, research approach, recruitment procedure, data collection, and method of data analysis will be described. Lastly, an overview of the themes identified will be presented.

### **1.4.1 Qualitative research design**

This study adopted an exploratory and descriptive qualitative methodological approach. In qualitative research, the researcher is seen as an “observer in the world” who uses interpretive practices to describe their observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 43). According to Patton (2015), the aim of qualitative research is to report on and interpret participants' meaning-making process of the topics set out to be explored. The data obtained through qualitative research is, therefore, naturalistic, describing the subjective experiences of participants through the researcher's interpretation and reflection of their own words (Willig, 2013).

Unlike quantitative research designs, there is no intention to generalise findings from qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The aim is rather to gain rich data from in-depth accounts by participants on their experiences of phenomena within their unique social contexts (Willig, 2013). A multiple case study design, as proposed by Yin (2017), allows for rich, descriptive narratives to be generated through semi-structured interviews. The accounts of each participant were therefore seen as a unique case, providing for in-depth exploration and understanding of the phenomena investigated (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2017). Furthermore, using open-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews enhanced the explorative nature of the

study, as it allowed participants to describe their subjective experiences through their personal narratives (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Since this study was explorative in nature, a multiple case study qualitative research design was appropriate to obtain in-depth, descriptive accounts of the participants' motivations for their decision to partake in volunteer single fathering.

#### **1.4.2 Inductive and deductive approaches towards data analysis**

Qualitative researchers use inductive as well as deductive approaches to data analysis to establish themes and patterns from their data (Armat et al., 2018; Creswell, 2013). An inductive approach entails working from raw data, i.e., participants' responses, to derive codes and themes (Azungah, 2018). Analysis therefore starts with particulars and moves to more general perspectives (Creswell, 2013), with no expectations or theoretical frameworks guiding the analysis (Azungah, 2018). Inductive data analysis is often utilised in exploratory research where phenomena are explored and described (Jebb et al., 2017). A deductive approach refers to two processes. After analysing data inductively, the researcher rereads the raw data to gather evidence to support the themes and interpretations derived from their inductive analysis (Creswell, 2013). Deductive approaches to data analysis may also refer to analysing data from within a theoretical framework or model (Armat et al., 2018). Codes and themes are determined before data analysis commences, and evidence for these *a priori* codes is purposively sought from the data (Christians, 2018).

Although the inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis in qualitative research are seen as two distinct processes, it has been argued that these terms may be misleading (Armat et al., 2018). Since researchers are guided by their research questions and will always have prior knowledge of their topics, data analysis can never truly be solely inductive (Armat et al., 2018; Jackson & Mazzei, 2018). Likewise, when codes or themes do not fit with the chosen theory or model during the deductive approach, "new" categories may emerge or be created inductively (Armat et al., 2018). It is therefore suggested rather to use inductively and

deductively directed to describe the different approaches to qualitative data analysis (Armat et al., 2018; Jackson & Mazzei, 2018).

Since the current study was explorative in nature, with an aim to explore the phenomenon of volunteer single fathering within a novel context, it was suitable to initially analyse data with an inductively directed approach (Creswell, 2013; Jebb et al., 2017). This allowed for the emergence of codes and themes from the participants' accounts, reflecting their narratives. During this initial data analysis, the ideas and constructs from the TBP in Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT arose clearly from the data, specifically the importance of competence, autonomy, and relatedness as basic psychological needs which drive motivation. A deductively directed approach using a lens of the TBP led further analysis of the data. Final themes and subthemes were identified from concurrent inductive and deductive data analysis approaches.

#### ***1.4.3 Participants and recruitment procedure***

The initial aim was to recruit six participants to partake in the study, as researchers suggest using a small sample of six participants when seeking information-rich data (Patton, 2015; Reid et al., 2005). However, as often occurs when conducting research within family studies (Roy et al., 2015), recruitment proved to be challenging. After interviews were conducted with five single fathers, it was found that data saturation was reached, and the recruitment procedure was ended.

Participants were recruited according to the following criteria:

1. Single men who chose to become fathers via surrogacy or adoption.
2. Participants who are primary caregivers of their children.
3. Participants who were single when the child was conceived or when the child came into their care.
4. Participants who are able to speak English or Afrikaans.
5. Participants who are South African and may be from any demographic groupings, including age, sexuality and race.

Participants were recruited by means of purposive and snowball sampling, as these methods are appropriate when specific cases are needed (Smith, 2017). Initial contact with participants was always through a mutual acquaintance who asked potential participants whether they would be interested in taking part in a study on volunteer single fathering. Once the potential participants agreed that their contact details may be shared, the researcher contacted them and sent information on the study as well as the informed consent form to them via email (please see Appendix B for the study information leaflet and Appendix C for the participant informed consent form). The participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and that the researcher committed to ethical research practices. Participants were then contacted again to confirm whether they would like to form part of the study, and an interview was scheduled. Please see Table 1 for a summary of the particulars of the participants. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, limited information is given.

**Table 1***Participant information*

| Name <sup>a</sup> | Age | Age of child | Pathway                             | Sexuality    | Current relationship status | Interview platform | Language  |
|-------------------|-----|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Tommy             | 55  | 10           | Adoption                            | Homosexual   | Single                      | Skype              | Afrikaans |
| Arthur            | 49  | 10           | Adoption                            | Homosexual   | Single                      | Skype              | Afrikaans |
| Andre             | 31  | 3            | Adoption                            | Homosexual   | Engaged                     | Microsoft Teams    | Afrikaans |
| Jonty             | 56  | 7            | Surrogacy                           | Heterosexual | Single                      | Zoom               | English   |
| Joseph            | 31  | 3            | Adoption/<br>Surrogacy <sup>b</sup> | Homosexual   | Single                      | In person          | Afrikaans |

Note. The sex of all the children is male

<sup>a</sup>Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

<sup>b</sup>Joseph legally adopted his son during the pregnancy, and therefore undertook a hybrid adoption/surrogacy pathway to becoming a single father.

Fertility clinics, adoption agencies, a law firm specialising in surrogacy, and support groups for single parents were also contacted and requested to send information on the study to people they may know who satisfy the inclusion criteria. However, despite many follow-up attempts, no participants were recruited via these channels.

#### **1.4.4 Data collection: qualitative interviews**

Researchers recommend using semi-structured interviews when conducting qualitative, explorative research to obtain in-depth knowledge of participants' experiences (Patton, 2015; Smith, 2017). Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, with open-ended questions focusing on the fathers' motivations for volunteer single fathering. (Please see Appendix D for the interview schedule that was used.) The semi-structured nature of the interviews granted the researcher the opportunity to engage in a conversational tone with participants, encouraging them to openly reflect on their journeys to becoming VSFs and

allowing the researcher flexibility to probe when clarification or elaboration were needed. This yielded rich, in-depth responses from the participants.

The first four interviews were conducted via online platforms, due to the participants being in different locations than the researcher. The fifth interview was conducted in person. For all interviews, privacy was ensured by the participants choosing their surroundings during the interview and the researcher being alone while conducting the interview. Although consent forms were signed and received electronically prior to the interviews, the researcher explained the consent form and obtained verbal consent from participants before starting the interviews. All interviews were conducted in the participant's first language and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

With the permission of participants, video recordings were made of the online interviews and an audio recording of the in-person interview. Recordings were stored on the researcher's password-protected devices. Verbatim transcriptions were made of the recordings, ensuring accurate accounts of the participants' narratives. A total of 109 pages were yielded from the transcription process, indicating the thoroughness of the research process and detailed narratives provided by the participants.

#### **1.4.5 Data analysis**

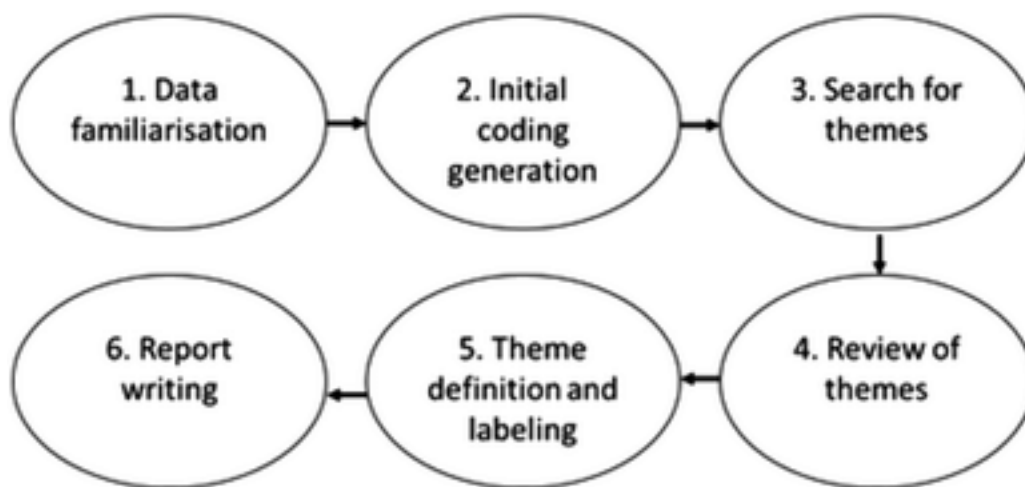
Transcribed data were analysed using a hybrid method combining inductive and deductive-directed analysis approaches (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The inductive directed approach entailed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step thematic analysis (TA) method. The deductive-directed approach entailed analysing data from an SDT-driven perspective, specifically exploring the role that the participants' sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness played in their motivations for becoming VSFs.

The TA framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022) offers a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data. This method allows reflection on participants' meaning-making process of their journeys to become VSFs (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The meaning of their

reflections on their experiences was co-constructed between the researcher and the participants during the interviews. The analysis by the researcher, therefore, offers a partial understanding of the participants' specific social contexts (Acker et al., 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The six steps of TA that were applied throughout data analysis are illustrated in Figure 1 and described below.

**Figure 1**

*Data analysis steps and description*



*Note.* Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2013).

Step 1: Familiarising yourself with the data.

- The first step in the TA process involves thorough familiarisation with the data. Since the researcher personally conducted all the qualitative interviews, the data was already familiar to her. Further familiarisation took place during the transcription process. All transcriptions were verified by reading the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings of the interviews. During this process, the data was looked at analytically and critically when making initial observations, discerning complexities, and patterns within the data.

Step 2: Open coding the interviews.

- The following step entails generating initial codes via line-by-line open coding of the transcriptions. This detailed process ensures that all important, relevant, and interesting content in the transcriptions is encapsulated by the codes. The Atlas.ti software (version 23 for Mac) was used to facilitate this process. Throughout this process, codes were merged when appropriate, and a total of 131 open codes were generated. (Please see Appendix E for a table of the codes generated from open coding.)

Step 3: Developing potential themes that represent the data set.

- In this step, an initial theme map was drafted from the codes generated in Step 2. The codes were grouped into five broad code groups, representing potential themes. These groups were assigned keywords, namely: Advocacy, Capabilities, Gender roles, Meaning, and Pathways.

Step 4: Verifying potential themes.

- The five broad code groups identified during the previous step were then critically evaluated. The potential themes were examined in relation to the entire dataset and the coded extracts. Codes with a low density were discarded, and codes with high prevalence were further scrutinised. Overlapping codes and ideas were merged, generating a theme map with four main themes and ten subthemes.

Step 5: Refining themes and identifying final primary and secondary/contradictory themes.

- The main themes and subthemes were refined through an iterative process during this penultimate step. During this process, the researcher determined whether the identified themes and subthemes reflected an accurate description of the participants' narratives. The subthemes and main themes were then organised to illustrate the links between themes and the hierarchy of meaning within the overarching themes.

Step 6: Reporting the findings as a mini-dissertation.

- In this final step, the extracts that best illustrate the identified themes were selected.

Quotations were chosen to respond to the research question and were situated within the extant literature on volunteer single fathering. The names of the subthemes and overarching themes were finalised, as well as the organisation of the themes. A coherent description of the different themes was developed, incorporating the chosen quotations as evidence of the credibility of the analysis and interpretations made from the data.

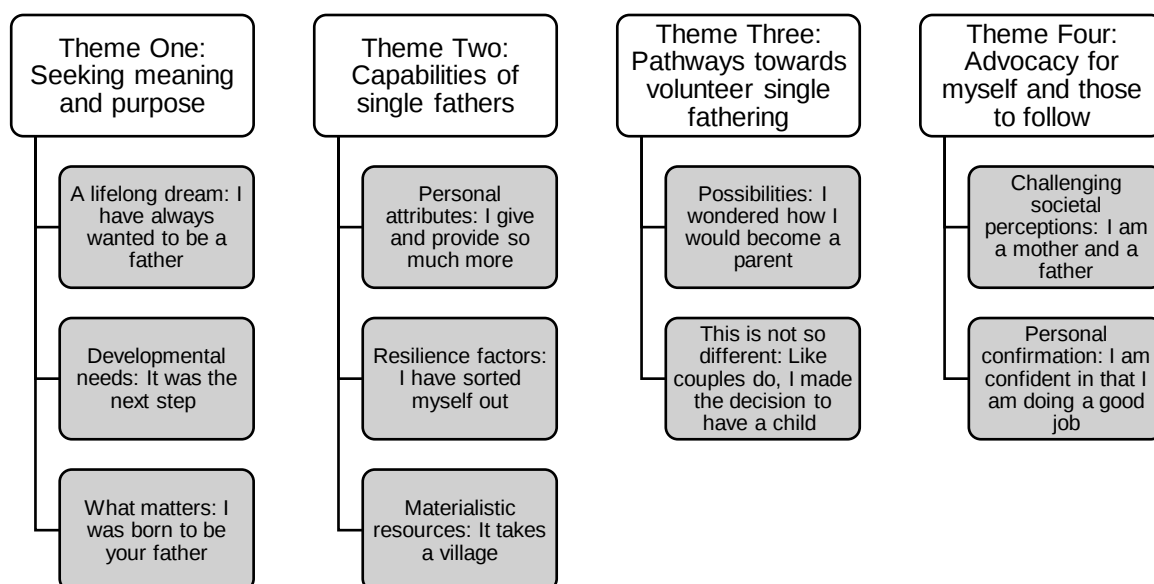
Finally, four main themes were identified, with ten subthemes.

#### 1.4.6 Themes

Themes generated from the inductively and deductively directed approaches were integrated to identify final themes and subthemes. Figure 2 illustrates the final themes and subthemes elucidated from the data.

**Figure 2**

*Themes: Volunteer single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice*



## **1.5 Trustworthiness and reflexivity**

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of data and researcher reflexivity are at the forefront to ensure that authentic reflections of the participants' accounts are reported (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by pursuing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Schwandt et al., 2007). The credibility of the data was obtained by using the appropriate research methods to obtain data, namely semi-structured interviews. Another mechanism used to improve data credibility was triangulation. This was achieved by using verbatim transcriptions, extensive notes compiled by the researcher during the data collection process and incorporating theoretical perspectives (Shenton, 2004).

To demonstrate transferability and dependability, the research process must be meticulously described in such a way that others may understand the study and be able to evaluate its relevance to the field (Shenton, 2004). Transferability and dependability were therefore ensured by the detailed description of the research methodology given above. Furthermore, an adequate academic literature review was conducted, situating the findings within relevant academic literature (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, the process of purposive sampling and reaching data saturation from multiple participants also improved data transferability and dependability (Schwandt et al., 2007).

According to Shenton (2004), confirmability in research is to ensure that "findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Therefore, researcher subjectivity and reflexivity are essential to obtain confirmability and reduce researcher bias (Shaw, 2010; Shenton, 2004). During the research process, the researcher took a reflexive stance during data collection and analysis. She remained aware of how her thoughts and experiences might influence how she asked questions during interviews and how she interpreted the phenomena

explored (England, 1994; Shaw, 2010). To aid in this reflexivity, a transparent data audit trail was maintained during the entire process (Shenton, 2004).

## **1.6 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was granted by the General Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC) at the University of the Free State (Ethical Clearance Number: UFS-HSD2021/0993/21/22). Please see Appendix F for the ethical approval letter. Information on the research study was given to participants before starting the interview, where the purpose of the study, the research process, potential risks, and the rights of the participants were explained. Participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw at any time – without any negative consequences. Participants were then given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study before giving their informed consent to participate.

Interviews were conducted in private settings at a time and place convenient for the participants. For the online interviews, participants were offered a data voucher from their preferred network. However, the participants all declined the offer. The confidentiality of participants was ensured by using pseudonyms and not reporting any identifying information in this mini-dissertation. Audio-recordings, as well as interview transcripts, were stored electronically on the researcher's password-protected devices.

Participants were offered the opportunity for debriefing after the interview was done, sponsored by the researcher, but none of the participants requested therapeutic support. However, the contact details for accessible free counselling services (such as LifeLine and the South African Anxiety and Depression Support Group) and government clinics offering free counselling services were given to participants as part of the information on the informed consent form, of which they had copies. Two of the participants requested to see their transcripts but did not request any alterations to be made. All participants also requested to receive any publications that may arise from the research study.

## 1.7 Conclusion

The overview of the research process provided in this section served to situate this study within the field of fatherhood studies. With the development of ART, a greater variation of family structures is now possible. One such family form, consisting of a VSF and their child/children, was the focus of this study. From the literature reviewed, the paucity of research on this alternative family structure was clearly shown. Although there has been an increase in literature on VSFs in the global north, albeit limited, there has been no research exploring VSFs in the South African context, despite reports in popular media of South African men who engage in volunteer single fathering (Ndongeni-Ntlebi, 2021; Price, 2021). This study, therefore, takes the first step towards addressing this gap in the South African literature on single fathers.

Since there was no previous knowledge of this topic in our context, an explorative research design was deemed appropriate. To start laying the foundation for future research on VSFs in South Africa, this study aimed to explore the motivations of the single fathers who started a family on their own through adoption or surrogacy. As was described in this section, a multiple case study qualitative research design was employed to obtain in-depth, descriptive accounts of the participants' motivations for their decision to partake in volunteer single fathering. The researcher maintained ethical integrity throughout the process and no ethical dilemmas were encountered.

The rich data obtained were analysed using hybrid inductive and deductive-directed analysis approaches. By utilising the systematic TA method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022), as well as looking at the data from a TBP lens situated within SDT, interesting themes emerged that illustrated the meaningful journeys the participants embarked on. The four main themes identified were: *Seeking meaning and purpose in life*; *Capabilities of single fathers*; *Pathways towards volunteer single fathering*; and *Advocacy for myself and those to follow*. Within each main theme, subthemes were identified. Appropriate steps were taken to pursue credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data. The researcher also

maintained a reflexive stance throughout the study by being especially cognisant of her own bias and subjectivity. These steps work towards ensuring the trustworthiness of the data and themes found.

Upon reflection on Section A, the importance of the study is evident. The most valuable contribution this research may offer to the field is to serve as a basic introduction to the lived experiences of VSFs. This introduction may be beneficial to future researchers to expand on the limited South African literature on this unique family form.

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## Section B: Manuscript

This section contains the manuscript to be submitted to the Journal of Family Studies. Please see Appendix G for the journal's guidelines to authors.

### Abstract

Despite the hegemony of marital heteronormative parenthood and the nuclear family ideal, alternative family forms have been increasing since the development and easier access to assisted reproductive technology. Volunteer single fathering represents one such alternative family form, where men choose to become single fathers via surrogacy or adoption and are the sole primary caregivers of their children. The limited research available on this specific family type is all situated in the global north. Therefore, this qualitative study set out to explore the phenomenon of volunteer single fathers (VSFs) within the South African context. Utilising a multiple-case study design, the motivations of five South African men who chose to become VSFs were explored. Thematic analysis of the participants' accounts showed that these men viewed fatherhood as a means of finding a purpose in their lives. They reflected on the capabilities of single fathers to be primary caregivers and spoke of wanting to raise awareness of the different pathways available to men to become VSFs. Lastly, the participants advocated for themselves and highlighted the benefits of being sole primary caregivers. It was also found that the VSFs challenge traditional stereotypes of gender roles, and their motivation and determination to intentionally take this step was further looked at within a theoretical stance informed by Self-Determination Theory, specifically the Theory of Basic Psychological Needs. Since there is no other South African research specifically focusing on VSFs, this explorative study lays the foundation for future research to expand on this unique family form in the South African context.

*Keywords:* Volunteer single fathers, Self-Determination Theory, surrogacy, adoption, South Africa, contesting gender roles

## 2.1 Introduction

The idea of the nuclear family unit consisting of two parents, male and female, and their biological children, is a Western ideal that became the norm globally after industrialisation and colonisation (Lamb, 2000). Although marital heteronormative parenthood is still regarded as the ideal in mainstream thought, there has been a rise in alternative family forms over the last three decades (Maya & Adital, 2018). This rise could be attributed to the development of assisted reproductive technologies (ART), such as *in vitro* fertilisation, egg donation, and gestational surrogacy (Johnson, 2017). The frequent use and easier access to ART has led to societal acceptance of these avenues to parenthood, in turn leading to an acceptance of alternative family forms (Maya & Adital, 2018) such as families with same-sex parents, single mothers by choice and voluntary single fathering (Johnson, 2017).

It has been widely reported that the number of single-father households increased rapidly since the 1970s (Coles, 2015). Most research on single fathers as primary caregivers has focused on child outcomes or compared the experiences of single fathers to that of single mothers (e.g., Coles, 2002, 2015; Steffens et al., 2019). These studies mostly focused on men who were the sole primary caregivers of their children, either after their spouse passed away or their relationship ended (Arboleda & Singson, 2022). Voluntary single fathers (VSFs), however, are a specific group within the population of single fathers who are “heterosexual, gay, or bisexual men who actively elect to parent alone through adoption or surrogacy” (Carone et al., 2020, p. 2). The important distinguishing feature of this group is that they choose to become single parents, making a conscious decision to become a father via adoption or surrogacy, without a partner (Maya & Adital, 2018). Choosing to become single fathers and primary caregivers shows the intentionality of these men to be fathers (Carone et al., 2020). They did not become a father and primary caregiver due to the ending of a relationship, but actively sought to be a single father (Johnson, 2017). Most of the extant literature on VSFs is situated within the context of gay men who chose adoption or surrogacy to become single fathers.

The decision to become a parent is influenced by many factors (Ross-Plourde & Basque, 2019). Choosing to become a parent through adoption or surrogacy involves further complexities of interrelated and overlapping motivations, which interact dynamically with barriers associated with these processes (Blake et al., 2017; Luyt & Swartz, 2023). When considering the motivational dynamics of any self-determined behaviour, such as becoming a single parent, the Theory of Basic Psychological Needs (TBPN), which forms part of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), may be relevant. SDT entails the self-motivation and self-determination that drive people's actions (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and is concerned with the impact of social-contextual factors on the satisfaction of people's basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the TBPN posits three psychological needs essential to facilitating growth, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence refers to a person's ability to deal with experiences in their environment, autonomy refers to the sense of choice that a person must behave in a way that they choose to, and relatedness to a person's experience of belonging and connectedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). All three of these needs can be hypothesised to be at play when men decide to become a single father.

Within the context of South Africa, there are many diverse family forms and functions due to various social, historical, political, and economic factors (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2010). There is a need for qualitative research to provide more contextual knowledge on family forms and functions among different social contexts in South Africa (Nduna & Khunou, 2018). There has also been a rise in single-father families in South Africa, with 3,7% of households headed by single fathers (StatsSA, 2023). However, it is unknown how these fathers became primary caregivers. Most South African literature on single parenthood focuses on single mothers and their experiences and challenges as single parents (Langa & Goldschmidt, 2021).

Although the term "father" may have different meanings globally, it is implicitly gendered and ascribed as a masculine role (Eerola & Mykkänen, 2015; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Steinour, 2018). The gendered assumption of fatherhood as a masculine activity is therefore

closely linked with the hegemonic masculinity (HM) ideals within societies (Connell, 2016; Morrell et al., 2013). Since masculine and feminine activities and behaviours are shaped by the social construction of gender within different contexts (Amato, 2018), the roles of mothers and fathers are dictated by societal norms (Makusha et al., 2013). Different roles and behaviours are then considered appropriate for mothers and fathers (Makusha et al., 2013; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019).

Men as primary caregivers challenge gender stereotypes (Lesch & Kelapile, 2016; Pereira & Beatriz, 2023; Steinour, 2018). It has been argued that fatherhood is a potential site to shift men's perceptions towards more equitable gender ideals, which is imperative in South Africa, with high rates of gender-based violence (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). VSFs contest traditional stereotypes of gender roles, and their motivation and determination to intentionally take this step need to be explored. Since there is currently no academic literature on VSFs in South Africa, this explorative and descriptive study grounded in the TBPB within the SDT framework set out to explore the motivations of South African men who have chosen to become single fathers through adoption or surrogacy.

## **2.2 Methodology**

### **2.2.1 Research design**

This study adopted an exploratory and descriptive qualitative methodological approach to obtain in-depth, descriptive accounts of the participants' motivations for their decision to partake in volunteer single fathering. This approach ensured that the subjective experiences of participants were captured and enabled the researcher to interpret and reflect on the participants' own words (Willig, 2013). By utilising a multiple case study design, the accounts of each participant were therefore seen as a unique case, providing for in-depth exploration and understanding of the phenomena investigated (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2017).

### **2.2.2 Participants**

The inclusion criteria for potential participants entailed that they were South African English- or Afrikaans-speaking men who made the decision to become fathers via surrogacy or adoption while they were not in a romantic relationship, and who were single at the time when they became the primary caregivers of their child/children.

Recruitment of participants proved to be especially challenging, as often occurs when conducting research within family studies (Roy et al., 2015). Participants were recruited by means of purposive and snowball sampling, as these methods are appropriate when specific cases are needed (Smith, 2017). Initial contact with participants was always through a mutual acquaintance who asked potential participants whether they would be interested in taking part in a study on volunteer single fathering. Once the potential participants agreed that their contact details may be shared, the researcher contacted them and gave them information about the study. The participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and that the researcher was committed to ethical research practices. Participants were then contacted again to confirm whether they would like to form part of the research study, and an interview was scheduled. Please see Table 2 for a summary of the particulars of the participants. In order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, limited information is given.

**Table 2***Participant particulars*

| Name <sup>a</sup> | Age | Age of child | Pathway                             | Sexuality    | Current relationship status | Interview platform | Language  |
|-------------------|-----|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Tommy             | 55  | 10           | Adoption                            | Homosexual   | Single                      | Skype              | Afrikaans |
| Arthur            | 49  | 10           | Adoption                            | Homosexual   | Single                      | Skype              | Afrikaans |
| Andre             | 31  | 3            | Adoption                            | Homosexual   | Engaged                     | Microsoft Teams    | Afrikaans |
| Jonty             | 56  | 7            | Surrogacy                           | Heterosexual | Single                      | Zoom               | English   |
| Joseph            | 31  | 3            | Adoption/<br>Surrogacy <sup>b</sup> | Homosexual   | Single                      | In person          | Afrikaans |

Note. The sex of all the children is male

<sup>a</sup>Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

<sup>b</sup>Joseph legally adopted his son during the pregnancy, and therefore had a hybrid adoption/surrogacy method to becoming a single father.

Fertility clinics, adoption agencies, a law firm specialising in surrogacy, and support groups for single parents were also contacted and requested to send information on the study to people they may know who satisfy the inclusion criteria. However, despite many follow-up attempts, no participants were recruited via these channels.

### **2.2.3 Data collection: qualitative interviews**

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, with open-ended questions focusing on the fathers' motivations for volunteer single fathering. The semi-structured nature of the interviews granted the researcher the opportunity to engage in a conversational tone with participants, encouraging them to openly reflect on their journeys to becoming single fathers and allowing the researcher flexibility to probe when clarification or elaboration were needed. This yielded rich, in-depth responses from the participants.

The first four interviews were conducted via online platforms due to the participants being in different locations than the researcher, and the fifth interview was conducted in person.

With the permission of participants, video recordings were made of the online interviews and an audio recording of the in-person interview. Recordings were stored on the researcher's password-protected devices. Verbatim transcriptions were made of the recordings, ensuring accurate accounts of the participants' narratives.

#### **2.2.4 Data analysis**

Transcribed data were analysed using a hybrid method combining inductive and deductive analysis approaches (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The inductive approach entailed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step thematic analysis (TA) method. The deductive approach entailed analysing data from the TBP, an SDT-driven perspective, and specifically exploring the role that the participants' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness played in their motivations for volunteer single fathering.

The TA framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022) offers a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data. This method allows reflection on participants' meaning-making process of their journeys to volunteer single fathering (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The meaning of their reflections on their experiences was co-constructed between the researcher and the participants during the interviews, and the analysis by the researcher, therefore, offers a partial understanding of the participants' specific social contexts (Acker et al., 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The six-step procedure within the TA framework was applied throughout the data analysis. The first step in the TA process involves thorough familiarisation with the data. Since the researcher personally conducted all the qualitative interviews, the data was already familiar to her. Further familiarisation took place during the transcription process. All transcriptions were verified by reading the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings of the interviews. The following step entails generating initial codes via line-by-line open coding of the transcriptions. The Atlas.ti software (version 23 for Mac) was used to facilitate this process. Throughout this process, codes were merged when appropriate, and a total of 131 open codes were generated.

In the third step, an initial theme map was drafted from the codes generated in Step 2. Five broad code groups were identified during this step. In the following steps, these code groups were critically evaluated, and potential themes were examined in relation to the entire dataset and the coded extracts. In the next step, the main themes and subthemes were refined through an iterative process. The researcher determined whether the identified themes and subthemes reflected an accurate description of the participants' narratives. The subthemes and main themes were then organised to illustrate the links between themes and the hierarchy of meaning within the overarching themes. In the final step, the extracts that best illustrate the identified themes were selected. Quotations were chosen to respond to the research question and were situated within the extant literature on volunteer single fathering. The names of the subthemes and overarching themes were finalised, as well as the organisation of the themes. A coherent description of the different themes was developed, incorporating the chosen quotations as evidence of the credibility of the analysis and interpretations made from the data. Finally, four main themes were identified, with ten subthemes.

### **2.2.5 *Trustworthiness of the Study***

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by pursuing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Schwandt et al., 2007). The credibility of the data was obtained by using the appropriate research methods to obtain data, namely semi-structured interviews. Another mechanism used to improve data credibility was triangulation. This was achieved by using verbatim transcriptions, extensive notes compiled by the researcher during the data collection process and incorporating theoretical perspectives (Shenton, 2004). Transferability and dependability were ensured by the detailed description of the research methodology given above (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, the process of purposive sampling and reaching data saturation from multiple participants enhanced data transferability and dependability (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Researcher subjectivity and reflexivity are essential to obtain confirmability and reduce researcher bias (Shaw, 2010; Shenton, 2004). Within the research process, the researcher took a reflexive stance during data collection and analysis. The researcher remained aware of how her thoughts and experiences might influence how she asked questions during interviews and how she interpreted the phenomena explored (England, 1994; Shaw, 2010). To aid in this reflexivity, a transparent data audit trail was maintained during the entire process (Shenton, 2004).

### **2.2.6 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval from the GHREC at the University of the Free State (Ethical Clearance Number:

UFS-HSD2021/0993/21/22) was secured before initiating the data collection process. Information on the research study was given to participants before starting the interview, where the purpose of the study, the research process, potential risks, and the rights of the participants were explained. Participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw at any time – without any negative consequences. Interviews were conducted in private settings at a time and place convenient for the participants. For the online interviews, participants were offered a data voucher from their preferred network. However, the participants all declined the offer. The confidentiality of participants was ensured by using pseudonyms and not reporting any identifying information. Audio-recordings, as well as interview transcripts, were stored electronically on the researcher's password-protected devices.

Participants were offered the opportunity for debriefing after the interview was done, sponsored by the researcher, but none of the participants requested further therapeutic support.

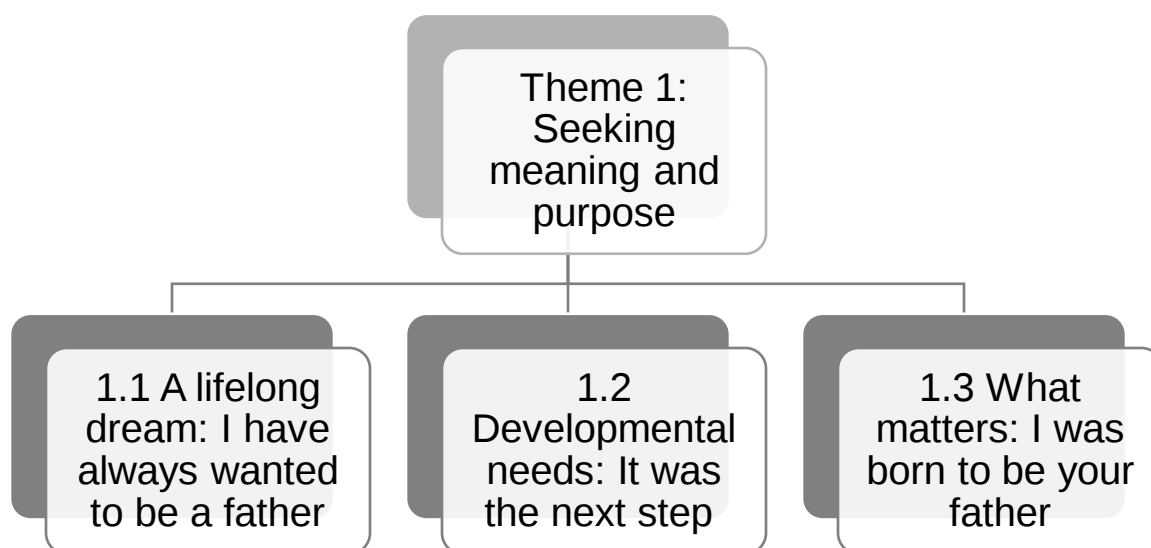
## **2.3 Findings**

Four main themes emerged from the interviews, namely: *Seeking meaning and purpose in life*; *Capabilities of single fathers*; *Pathways towards volunteer single fathering*; and *Advocacy for myself and those to follow*. Within each main theme, subthemes were identified.

Direct quotations from the participants' interviews are provided to illustrate findings, with pseudonyms used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Most of the quotes are English translations of excerpts from Afrikaans interviews, with minimal editing to preserve as much of the colloquial meaning as possible.

### 2.3.1 Theme One: Seeking meaning and purpose

Figure 3: Theme One with subthemes



The first theme identified from the participants' accounts was *Seeking meaning and purpose*. All the participants spoke of always wanting to become fathers and always having a need for their own families. They felt that being a father and caring for a child would bring purpose to their lives. This drive for finding meaning and purpose was a strong motivating force behind the participants' decisions to become VSFs. Within the main theme of *Seeking meaning and Purpose*, three subthemes emerged: *A lifelong dream: I have always wanted to be a father*, *Developmental needs: It was the next step*, and *What matters: I was born to be your father*.

### **2.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1 A lifelong dream: I have always wanted to be a father**

All the participants expressed that they had always wanted to be fathers, and that the idea had been in the back of their minds their whole lives.

As Andre explains:

I just always knew I wanted to be a father. It was always something in the back of my mind that I, that I knew I wanted. [...] You know, those dreams that you have for yourself. (Andre, adoption, 31)

He further expressed that he felt strongly about wanting children since he was young, and wanting to share the adventure of life with a child:

It was one of the things in life that I felt strongly about that I would like to have children. [...] I don't know, that, to share the adventure of life with a child. (Andre, adoption, 31)

Tommy also spoke of always having the idea of being a father at the back of his mind, that it has just always been there:

There wasn't something that triggered it or so, it has just always been there, the fact that I want children. [...] My whole adult life I wanted to be a father. So, it was kind of in the back of my mind the whole time. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

For Joseph, the thought has also just always been there, and he always knew it was not going to be the traditional way:

Since I can remember I have always wanted to be a parent, to be a father. [...] It has just always been there. Understand, I always knew I will not necessarily marry a woman or go that traditional way. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

Joseph further said that although he enjoyed the activities he did before becoming a father, he wanted more meaning in his life:

And that's when I realised, listen, yes it was nice, we went away and travelled and did things like that, but I wanted more. Understand, I seek more meaning. I want a child, yes. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

Arthur said that he always had a desire to be a parent and had a picture in his mind of him with his son:

I think I just always had that desire to be a parent. [...] I really wanted a family of my own. [...] But in my head, the picture was always just my son and me. It's not that I had a family in my head with myself, a partner, and a child. That was not part of the picture. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

Jonty, who became a single father via surrogacy, had similarly always wanted to be a father. Apart from wanting to care for someone, he also wanted to share what he had learnt with someone and to guide them throughout their lives.

### **2.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2 Developmental needs: It was the next step**

When speaking of their motivations for choosing to become single fathers, the participants portrayed their process of becoming fathers as the next step in their lives, an obvious developmental need.

Andre compared his need to raise a child and see someone growing up to the need that mothers naturally have. From a young age, Andre was familiar with foster care, as his parents were foster parents for children in need. He explained that this experience increased his urge to have a child of his own:

Because that need that uhm, people have, to raise a child. To see someone grow up. It was naturally with me like any other mother would have, a need to have children. [...] So that exposure I had to foster care just made that feeling and urge stronger for me. (Andre, adoption, 31)

Andre felt that this need to have a child would also give his life purpose, although he reflected there might be a selfish element to it:

I feel that need. Some people have a need, that a child would also enrich, to give their lives a purpose. I think that was what was my feeling.

You know, a person can be selfish when you, when you are alone. As a single person, without children or anything. (Andre, adoption, 31)

Like Andre, Arthur wondered whether his decision was selfish, as he felt that his decision to start a family was just about him. It was something that he desired and believed would be something for him to live for:

My adoption was actually just about me. [...] I wanted to start a family, I desired that. And it was my method of starting a family. Yes, so, I don't know if that is selfish or not. [...] I wanted to start a family and I wanted something to live for, I could not see it otherwise. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

In a similar vein, Arthur was motivated to start a family after seeing other gay men getting older and being alone. He did not want to end up like them:

I often looked at older, gay men and saw that they are always so alone, they did not build a family, it's actually such a lonely story. [...] I did not want to end up like that. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

Therefore, the drive to have a family was very strong for him, and he would not be easily deterred. It felt like the next step in his life:

I think the idea that I wanted to have a family, that drive was very strong. [...] I just felt it was my next step, I must do it, it's my next step. I think it was very deep-seated that this is what I want to do and how I see my life going forward. (Andre, adoption, 49)

Jonty explained that he got to a moment in his life where he had to decide whether he wanted to become a parent:

And sometimes, you know, I don't look at it as, like I was chasing the rainbow kind of thing. I was looking at it as like, you get to a moment in your life, and you need to make a decision. [...] But when it came time to make the decision, I made it with a lot of strength. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

### **2.3.1.3 Subtheme 1.3 What matters: I was born to be your father**

Most participants felt that being a father would offer them the meaning and purpose in their lives they have been seeking.

Joseph reflected on his life before becoming a father, when he would often go out with friends or travel and spent much energy on his work:

There's no meaning, we just do it because it is nice, and you do not want to be at home. And you work because you have nothing, there's just nothing else. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

For Joseph, being a father gives him a purpose and makes it all worthwhile. He describes his process as fate, that his son was sent to him, which led him to decide to become a single father:

It just makes it, all worthwhile, understand? To have a purpose to be on earth. Like I said on, on Facebook, I was born to be your father. Understand I was, literally, he was sent for me. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

Andre also wanted a purpose in life, which he got from sharing his outlook on the world with a child:

The feeling of purpose. I think it gives me, it was the biggest urge for me. Like, my individuality and me as a person, I feel I have purpose because I can be a father. There are some things that I can learn and how I see the world and uhm, these types of things that I can offer to a child. (Andre, adoption, 31)

For Jonty, it is very important to leave a legacy. He believes he can create a foundation for his children to flourish, which, in turn, they can pass on to their children:

And I think legacy is important, because all those things create that foundation, where people are able to flourish. And so that is legacy. You've, you've been able to pass on what is important in life, and what, and what will generate the best possible life for your children. And then they will do it for their kids, and so on. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

Another motivation for Jonty was to be a better and more involved father than his father. Although he felt his father was present, he was not involved in his upbringing. Arthur also mentioned his relationship with his father, and in a way, wanting a corrective experience through his own fathering, by having an opposite relationship with his son compared to his relationship with his father. Apart from wanting to care for someone, he also wants to have fun in his role as a parent:

We did not have that closeness where we could just sit and chat, you know. [...] He did care for us, but I also wanted that fun part. I cannot remember ever laughing with my parents. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

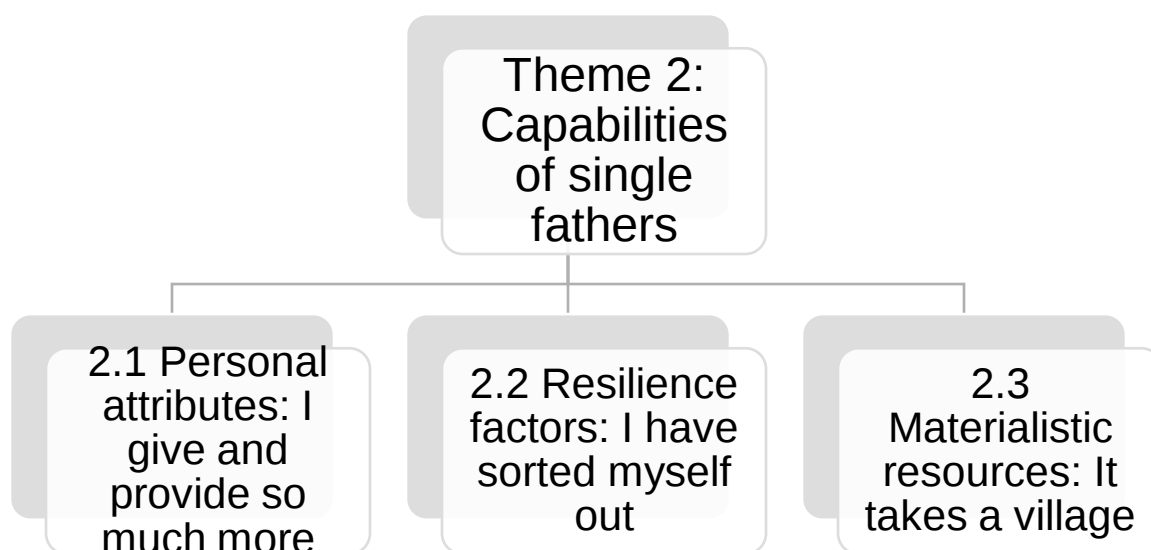
And like Jonty, Arthur also spoke of leaving a legacy behind:

I wanted a family, I wanted something that I could leave behind, I wanted that type of thing.

(Arthur, adoption, 49)

### 2.3.2 Theme Two: *Capabilities of single fathers*

Figure 4: Theme Two with subthemes



The second main theme identified was *Capabilities of single fathers*. The participants often spoke of various factors, internal and external, that make them suitable and capable of being single fathers. Believing in their own internal and external capabilities further motivated them to choose alternate ways to become fathers. Three subthemes were identified: *Personal attributes: I give and provide so much more*, *Resilience factors: I have sorted myself out*, and *Materialistic resources: It takes a village*.

#### 2.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1 Personal attributes: I give and provide so much more

All the participants emphasised the importance of being a loving father who can express their emotions and provide care. For Jonty, love is the most important aspect of parenting:

Like love is, is very important. I think love is the biggest tool, because it sort of gives you the confidence, to be able to be expressive, and to be the best version of yourself. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

Tommy also commented on how a single father must be much more than just a provider, especially since there is no mother:

Look, I think many fathers think that they must just provide, but it takes much more than that.

And, you know I think because there is not a mother, you know, I have to give and provide so much more. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

He further expressed his joy when caring for someone and that he believes that because he is gay, he has the characteristics to provide care for a child:

Yes, I think I have a lot ... I like to care for someone, and to treat them and to make food {laughs}.

Things like that. [...] But luckily I am gay. So we have a lot more of those caring characteristics or, features. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

Interestingly, Joseph and Andre also said that they have more caring and nurturing characteristics because of their sexual orientation:

I think because I am gay, I am a very uhm, soft person, who also appreciates the finer things in life. (Andre, adoption, 31)

And I also feel, you as a gay person can show more love than a heterosexual man necessarily can show, like understand? Uhm, I don't know. I'm just I'm more in touch with my emotions. So, I also offer, I feel, more to my child in all aspects. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

Another similarity between Tommy's and Andre's accounts was the reference to fathers being providers. Andre felt that men are often stereotyped as serious and emotionless, who must only focus on work and are seen as the financial providers. However, he disagrees, and challenges the gender roles assigned by society:

You know, fathers are also stereotyped as, uhm, serious and the strict one, cannot show emotions and he must work, not always be so present with his children. [...] Mothers are now more involved with raising children, and the father is, in general what the public sees, the

supporter. The provider. Uhm, so I think that is what makes it difficult for people to see that a father can look after a child, because he, it is not actually his role. But, that's why I always just feel like, who made those rules? (Andre, adoption, 31)

### **2.3.2.2 Subtheme 2.2 Resilience factors: I have sorted myself out**

Most participants spoke of challenging times they had gone through and believed that their resilience from those experiences equipped them to be single fathers. Joseph again related this to his sexuality:

I feel because we as gay people, from childhood [have to go] through school and university and family wise and stuff, have to go through certain hindrances. So we are so much more comfortable with ourselves. Uhm, and we experience so many different opinions and things that we just, you get so strong that it does not affect you. You just are who you are. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

Arthur also spoke of his experience of coming to terms with his sexuality. Before deciding to become a single father, he went to see a psychologist to process his decision:

I think it is just the {pause} the idea that there was always, in my head, something wrong with me, with the gay story. And I actually now decided fine, this is now who I am, now I want to make this decision. I am going to be a parent on my own, so I just wanted to make sure everything is fine. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

Tommy shared that, since he had been through many challenges by the time when he adopted his son, he felt he was equipped to become a father from his life experience. He also believed that he had sorted himself out by then and had done everything else he had wanted to do:

I think general life experience, and you know ... Because you have been through so much by that time. [...] You know what's important and what's not important, you know what to stress about and not stress about.

You have sorted yourself out by that time. Hopefully you have sorted yourself out. [...] I think when you are younger perhaps then you must still live and you know, go travel and party and you know whatever. Where, by that time I was already done with everything. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

Andre felt that he was prepared to become a father from the example that his parents set as foster parents and from helping them with the other children in their home:

I think, the last few years that my parents had children in foster care, we all, we relied on each other. [...] They were my brothers as well and I also had to help giving them bottles and bathing and changing nappies and teaching them lessons and stuff like that. (Ander, adoption, 31)

Joseph also believed he was well prepared since his mother was a single parent, and he knew what it would be like:

But I saw what it actually is. That's why, I think it was just easier for me to carry on. Because firstly I already knew what I was letting myself in for, because I grew up like that, and secondly, because I wanted to be a father with my whole heart. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

Joseph further felt that he was better equipped than some heterosexual couples, as he prepared himself and knew what to expect. Some heterosexual couples may have unplanned pregnancies, where he made an informed choice and knew all the costs involved in his decision:

And you know, you prepare yourself and literally know what you let yourself in for. Where a heterosexual couple may one night go out and drink too much wine, and get pregnant accidentally. Understand, then it just happens. [...] But I made this choice, completely aware of how it will be and that it's just me and him. And the adoption process, the costs associated, the emotional process associated with it, and all of that. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

### **2.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3 Materialistic resources: It takes a village**

All five participants reflected on the materialistic resources they had available, which ensured that they could make the decision to become single parents. These resources included finances, but more importantly, social support.

Jonty mentioned that one needs time and financial resources to embark on a surrogacy journey, but also emphasised the importance of his social support:

So you need, we spoke about time and resource. Those were the things that you needed. So if you didn't have those, this would be a massively challenging space. If you did have those, it's less challenging, but still got its own challenges. And you know, there's a village that's helped me along the way, I'm very conscious of that. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

Joseph also acknowledged the social support he knew he had, which enabled him to become a single father:

Yes definitely. And it takes a village to raise a child, understand? Uhm, it's literally not easy, if you are single or in a relationship, the grandmothers and grandfathers and brothers and everyone is always there. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

For Andre, knowing that he had support from his parents greatly influenced his decision to adopt his son. His mother's belief in his capability also encouraged him to believe that he could be a parent on his own:

But, I have to say, I was obviously with my mother and father on the farm. I think she had a very big influence on my decision. She supported me and I also kind of, decided that I can do this. (Andre, adoption, 31)

And like Jonty and Joseph, Andre expressed the importance of having a "village" to help you raise a child:

And I stand by what I said, it takes a village to raise a child. So, yes I am a single parent, or the parent that must look after this little girl or boy, but you have a lot of support from outside. (Andre, adoption, 31)

Most participants also commented on the financial resources needed to become a parent. Andre said it is even more important to consider when thinking of becoming a single parent:

I had to look at my finances, you have to see whether you can afford this. And because I was a single parent, it is a big responsibility. (Andre, adoption, 31)

Tommy believes that if he were younger and had more money, he would have liked to adopt another child:

Yes, I absolutely adore children, you know ... Look, if I was younger and had the money, I would probably now have had five or six. But unfortunately, I had to stop with one. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

Tommy also spoke of his social support, especially from women in his life. Apart from his sister, he specifically chose three of his female friends to be his child's godmothers:

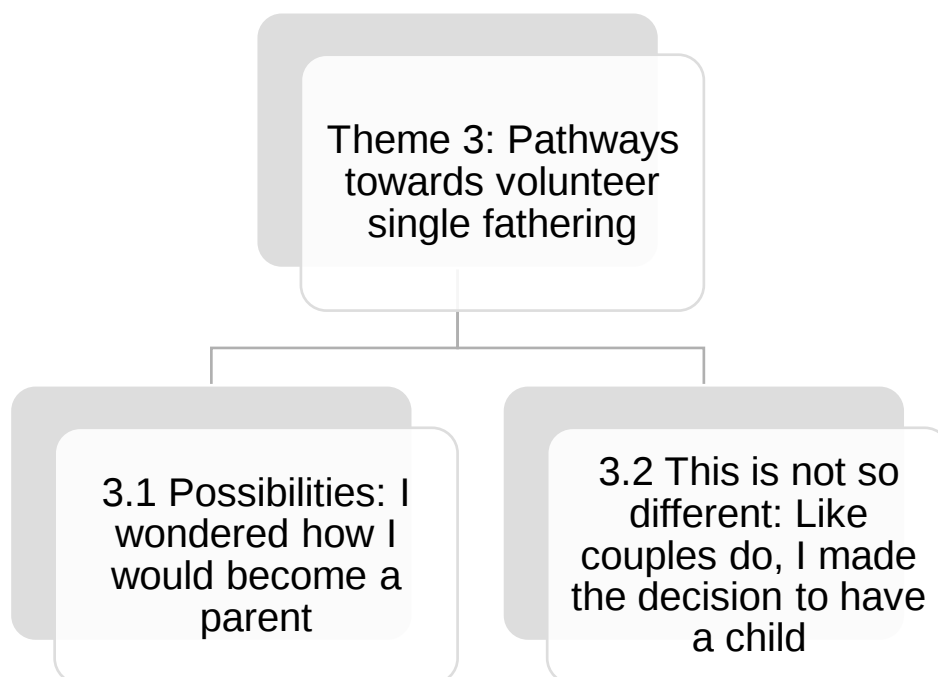
But I have my older sister whom I am very close to, she is amazing. So she kind of plays the role of the grandmother. [...] And uhm, I specifically chose his three godmothers, for specific reasons. They all offer something different and unique to him. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

For Arthur, the financial considerations were so integrated in the process that he did not even think about it, "*you must just be able to afford it, then it's fine*". What was important to him was the people who supported him, especially with the adoption process:

So there were also people I feel who were on my side at that time, as part of the adoption process. It is quite an application process where people must write character references and stuff for you. And yes they were always on my side, although it did take them some time also to get comfortable with the idea. But once they did, they were always there when I needed them. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

### 2.3.3 Theme Three: Pathways towards volunteer single fathering

Figure 5: Theme Three with subthemes



The next theme that emerged was *Pathways towards volunteer single fathering*. Participants expressed a longstanding desire to become a father, and the fact that there are pathways available to do so, albeit different than their original envisioned route to fatherhood, increased their motivation to embark on their respective journeys. Two subthemes were further identified, namely: *Possibilities: I wondered how I would become a parent*, and *This is not so different: Like couples do, I made the decision to have a child*.

#### 2.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1 Possibilities: I wondered how I would become a parent

When reflecting on their process of deciding to become a VSF, most participants spoke of first accepting that they were going to take a solo, alternate pathway to fatherhood. Once they had made that decision, they explored the potential pathways that were available to them. Realising there were different options and that they could choose an alternate pathway they were comfortable with increased their motivation to start their journey to fatherhood.

Arthur poignantly spoke of having had to change the picture of a traditional family that was in his mind after accepting his sexuality, since he had a strong desire to have a family:

I think when I was first able to get past that, I could shift from I am going to marry, I could move away from I am not going to marry, it is not going to happen, with a woman. But that initial desire to have a family, I just had to change that picture a little because I still wanted a family, but it is not going to be the normal picture that I had when I was in school. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

Arthur further said he felt that he had to adapt what he envisioned quickly, as he was getting older:

I had to create a different picture for myself, and I had to do it quickly, because I can't make that decision one day when I'm 50, I must do it soon enough. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

Jonty also spoke of his age and wanting to get the process started, since he did not want to miss significant milestones in his child's life:

And, you know, it's late in the day, as a parent, and you want to be there for milestones, and make sure that they get to experience that. Because they want to share with the significant people in their lives as well. So, I think that's something that I did think about. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

Andre, on the other hand, did not always have the idea that he needed a partner to start a family. He, therefore, did not really have to adjust previous ideas he had on becoming a father:

I was not always set on the idea that I, that I must get a partner. I always said that I will be able to do this if I just, just have a child. I will be happy if I have a child. (Andre, adoption, 31).

Similarly, Joseph decided after his relationship ended that he would become a father in whichever way possible:

But, one way or another, through adoption or through surrogacy, there is a way. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

After making the decision to become a single father, Arthur investigated the options that were available and considered surrogacy at first. However, he chose adoption and explained that it was a practical decision that he felt comfortable with:

Before I decided on adoption, I first looked at what are the other options out there, and surrogacy was one, but I did some research and realised that no, that is not what I want, that's not how I want it.

I just made a practical decision to have a child, to be able to start a family I made a practical decision, and that is how I will get my child. I was comfortable with the idea of adoption as the vehicle to get where I wanted to in terms of family. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

Jonty, on the other hand, preferred to have a biological child:

I thought to myself, if I can have my own genetic offspring, then that would be preferable. And whilst I was still capable, then I went down that pathway. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

He saw surrogacy as a business transaction, which, in the end, was a transformational experience for him and the surrogate:

And, in a way, in a way, I sort of embarked on this project, I mean, in that sort of a business sense, because it was actually a business transaction, right?

The relationship between you and your surrogate, it should be, it, it can be transformational for both parties, because the surrogate is giving you like the greatest gift of your life. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

As for Tommy and Andre, it was not important to have a biological child. Since Andre was familiar with the idea of foster care from a young age, fostering a child and adoption was something that he had always wanted to do, and it was a decision that came easily to him:

It was something that I had a lot of exposure to from young, or from a young age. And I always knew that it was something that I wanted to do, I love children a lot. (Andre, adoption, 31)

Once the participants chose their respective alternate ways to become fathers, they had to navigate the various systems available.

Jonty acknowledged that although there are different options, it might not be possible for everyone:

Like, some people can't do it because it's, it can be costly. Some people can't do it because they're, they don't have the time. You know, they're working really hard, long hours. And so you need presence. You need, you need time and resource, money, to be able to go down this road. But, it's available. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

Many participants reported challenges when working through government adoption agencies. However, the participants then chose to embark on the adoption process through private adoption agencies. After trying surrogacy, Joseph tried foster care with the idea that it might lead to adoption. However, he found it too difficult to work with the state agency:

And like with the first time with the surrogacy that did not work out, I tried a state agency, to become a weekend parent and then eventually foster care and then adopting full-time. But the government makes that also impossible. It is like they want to keep the children in children's homes. (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

Tommy also decided on a private adoption after initially approaching a state adoption agency:

I started phoning around, and first spoke to a state agency [...] and just from the telephone conversation, I realised oh no, this is not going to gel because it felt to me as though it was a machine, and the next one is being thrown to the next one. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

However, Tommy was very pleased with the process when working through a private adoption company, saying it was "*very good and thorough*". He also knew that according to South African law, he could not be refused as an adoptive parent if he was deemed fit for parenting:

And you know, the democracy is such that they cannot refuse you. If you pass all the tests, they cannot refuse you. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

Tommy and Joseph both made recommendations on how the process can be improved. Tommy noted that it would have been beneficial to discuss the process beforehand with

someone who had been through it. Joseph commented on the need for training of hospital staff. After the birth of his adopted son, whom he legally adopted while his biological mother was pregnant with him, the staff did not want him to leave with his child:

But the staff needs to get the proper training, and to know that there is not just the traditional way of having children, with a man and a woman who comes in, goes through labour and walks out.  
(Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

### **2.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2 This is not so different: Like couples do, I made the decision to have a child**

The last subtheme was that the participants viewed their journeys to becoming parents as similar to the journeys of couples. They saw this as reassurance that they could be parents too, regardless of not having a partner. Referring to heterosexual couples, Arthur said:

So I did like a normal family, like you decide you want to have a child, then you decide OK you are going to try from now on to have a child. [...] The decision is you want to start a family. People just can't get to that stage where they see that it is just another way to start a family.  
(Arthur, adoption, 49)

Once he had decided to become a single father, Joseph was often asked whether he would be able to adjust his lifestyle to accommodate a child. He compared this to a woman who must change her lifestyle when she becomes pregnant and who would not be asked the questions that he was confronted with:

Then I thought to myself, but remember: any mother, before she falls pregnant, is also perhaps a party animal and travelling and all that. Understand, once you fall pregnant, then you start changing as a person, to get yourself ready for the future. But all of us were who we were before we had a child. [...] So I was like, why are you asking me this question, because you did not ask yourself that question before you got pregnant, did you? (Joseph, surrogacy/adoption, 31)

When considering surrogacy, Jonty consulted with one of his friends who had gone through the process. He was told that parenting is tough in general, that it is not only specific to single parents:

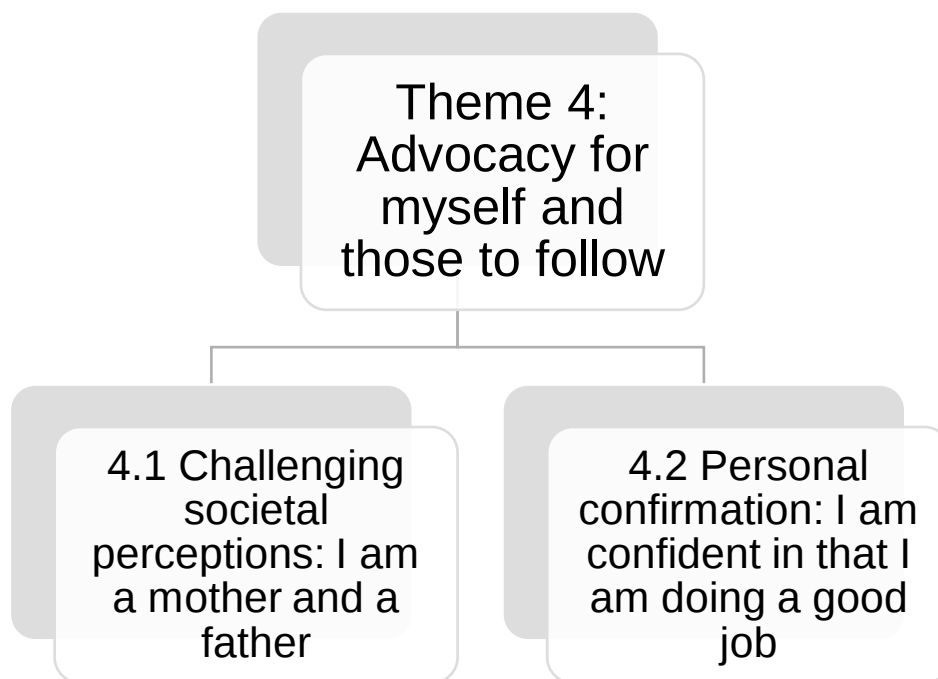
The downside is just parenting can be tough sometimes, but it's not specific to being a single parent at all. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

Similarly, Andre reflected on the challenges of parenting in general, that he knew it would be difficult whether you are on your own or with a partner:

I think the challenges might be different than the challenges that a mother and a father might experience when raising a child, but everyone has a type of hindrance or problems or issues with raising children. [...] For me, I knew the challenges are almost, it's, the thing that you expect when you raise a child and become a parent. Whether you are a single parent or a parent with a partner. (Andre, adoption, 31)

#### **2.3.4 Theme Four: Advocacy for myself and those to follow**

Figure 6: Theme Four with subthemes



The last main theme identified was *Advocacy for me and those to follow*. The participants had a strong drive to increase awareness of the available possibilities and enjoyment of becoming single fathers in South Africa. They saw themselves as potential role

models for other men, framing their advocacy as one of their life goals. Since having a role to play and goals to work towards are strongly linked to life satisfaction, these aspects further increased their motivation to become single fathers. Within this main theme, two subthemes emerged, namely: *Challenging societal perceptions: I am a mother and a father*, and *Personal confirmation: I am confident in that I am doing a good job*.

#### **2.3.4.1 Subtheme 4.1 Challenging societal perceptions: I am a mother and a father**

All the participants mentioned challenges they faced during their process of becoming parents. However, these challenges seemed to encourage them to prove to others that a single-father family is a legitimate family form, contesting the idea that men are not suitable to raise children on their own.

Andre, for instance, expressed a frustration with society's traditional view of gender roles:

It was never ever, that women must have those specific roles. I think it's much more traditional. If you look at modern families, there are many fathers who take over the role of the mother. (Andre, adoption, 31)

When reflecting on the responses he got after sharing his decision to adopt a child on his own, he also said:

What would come up were things like "a child needs a mother", and there are things that a mother must, must do for a child. Or that natural sense for certain things. And I have always been firm about it and said that I do not feel that gender plays a big role. I am a mother and a father and I can do anything that a single mother can do. (Andre, adoption, 31)

The idea of motherly instincts was echoed in Joseph's response when he reflected on the reactions from others during his decision-making process to become a single father:

Like I just said, immediately there's uhm, that perception of because you are a man, you will not necessarily be able to look after an infant from birth. How will you have those motherly instincts? (Joseph, adoption/surrogacy, 31)

Tommy also said that he thought many people believe that men cannot be sole primary caregivers or even must not be, hinting at a stigma that it is inappropriate:

Because I think many people think, uhm, that it cannot be done or that it should not be done or must not be done. [...] They think men are not capable [...] to bring what a mother does. But it can actually be done. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

Although these three participants seemed to contest the traditional view of gender roles, Arthur maintained that a child needs a female and a male figure in their lives:

I can only play the roles within myself, and I can broaden myself as far as possible, but I am only a man. And I think it is the same when it is just a woman, there will always be aspects around a man that the child will miss out on. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

Arthur further expressed frustration with the lack of awareness of adoption as an alternative pathway for single men to become fathers, saying “*they are unfamiliar with the idea that you can start a family in this way*”, and frustration with the lack of understanding that a man can have this desire:

That a single man can have that strong desire to become a father, so strong that he will adopt. They cannot comprehend it. (Arthur, adoption, 49).

For Tommy, it was also important to raise awareness about adoption in general, and being an example to others:

No, you know, I think it's important because I think there are ... You know an interesting thing about my adoption, long ago I sat and counted, I think there were, was it six or eight children who were adopted directly due to my adoption.

Men, women, couples. And many people walk around with the idea in their head, but they never continue to the next step. [...] So yes, uhm, because of, when they saw OK, he went through it and look how happy he is, you know, that can happen with me as well. (Tommy, adoption, 55)

The need for some men to become fathers was also touched on by Andre, who felt that he wanted to inspire such men with his own story of becoming a single father:

[There are men] who now also have that need, but do not know whether they are ready for it. So it was [...] almost as though it can be an inspiration for people. Our, our story. (Andre, adoption, 31)

Although Jonty did not mention stigma, he felt very strongly about raising awareness about surrogacy as a different pathway for men to becoming fathers:

But there's not many straight guys who go down this road. [...] If you don't get married, in the Hollywood sense, male, female, have two kids live happily ever after. There is another pathway available to men. [...] But I just wanted to try and create an awareness of, you know, when you think that you're done, or when other people think you're done. And your, your boat has, has sailed, that there are still pathways for you to achieve these things that you want. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

#### **2.3.4.2 Subtheme 4.2 Personal confirmation: I am confident in that I am doing a good job**

Within their reflections on their motivation for becoming VSFs, the participants seemed to advocate for themselves that their chosen route to fatherhood was the correct decision.

Arthur discussed how strong his internal desire was to become a father, how he saw himself in that role, and his determination to pursue that goal, whether he was supported by those around him or not:

It wasn't an idea that just popped up because I saw something, it was an internal desire, that I wanted a family. And I saw myself in such a role and I saw myself getting older in such a role, I saw myself having grandchildren. [...] And I liked this picture that I saw, so that was the line I wanted to walk. So I think it was very internal, and it was almost like you are now walking with me or not with me, that's your decision, but it's going to happen. So I think my internal drive was just stronger. (Arthur, adoption, 49)

He further reflected that he prefers being a single parent, that he feels it would be *"too complicated to bring in another person"*. This was echoed by Tommy, who believes being a single father is beneficial rather than a deficit:

It is quite important to me, it's that ... Because I am a single parent, you know, they only hear one voice. [...] It's not one person saying yes and then he goes to another person who says no.

(Tommy, adoption, 55)

Speaking about partners earlier on, Tommy mentioned that ending a romantic relationship, which he thought was not a healthy environment for a child, led to him seriously considering adoption:

I was in a relationship that was ... I did not think that it was at all, you know, it was not good for [a child], uhm such a situation. And eventually we broke up and then, when that happened, I totally started to uhm, think more about it. And I started doing a bit of research and calling around, and then I did it! (Tommy, adoption, 55)

Like Tommy, Jonty was also prompted to start the process of surrogacy after a romantic relationship ended. However, it was not due to frustration in the relationship but rather that he felt he was at a point in life where he wanted to start a family:

I spoke a little bit about the fact that I was dating, you know, and I had girlfriends and it just never worked out and then, and then I made this decision. (Jonty, surrogacy, 56)

Joseph's initial attempt at becoming a single father via surrogacy was also prompted by the ending of a romantic relationship:

I wanted to start a family on my own. [...] And then, while on holiday, one of the things was that we must start looking at having a child together. And he did not want that at all. And that was a breaking point for me, and I ended the relationship and moved out, bought a house and did my own thing. (Joseph, adoption/surrogacy, 31)

## 2.4 Discussion

### 2.4.1 *Seeking meaning and purpose in life: Driven by the basic psychological needs of autonomy and relatedness*

The first main theme, *Seeking meaning and purpose in life*, illustrated that the participants were seeking a purpose and wanted to live more meaningful lives. The idea of parenthood offering purpose and meaning was echoed in much of the literature on motivation to

becoming parents via adoption or surrogacy (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Högbäck, 2008; Luyt & Swartz, 2023; Pereira & Beatriz, 2023). This motivation of seeking a purpose through parenthood is classified as self-oriented (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Högbäck, 2008) since the parents are intrinsically motivated by the benefit of becoming fathers (Luyt & Swartz, 2023). Högbäck (2008) and De Maeyer et al. (2014) also reported that the Finnish and Flemish adoptive parents in their respective studies cited “finding meaning” as a common reason for wanting to adopt a child.

The VSFs in this study further expressed that becoming a father fulfilled their lifelong dreams, an idea that had been at the back of their minds since they were young. This is similar to the reports of the Italian VSFs interviewed by Carone et al. (2017), and the adoptive parents in Högbäck’s (2008) study, who explained that the desire to be a parent and to start a family were significant motivating factors behind their decisions to become parents via alternate pathways. Luyt and Swartz (2023) found that the adoptive parents in their study were also strongly motivated by a desire to have a child and to grow their families.

Fatherhood was also framed as a developmental need by the VSFs in this study, the next step needed in their lives to give them purpose. The prospective fathers who participated in Goldberg et al.’s (2012) study expressed a similar sentiment, viewing parenthood as a developmental stage. They emphasised family process rather than family structure, and valued family connections. Blake et al. (2017) also reported that the fathers decided to start the surrogacy process because they felt it was the right time in their lives. This is similar to the VSFs in the current study, who wanted to experience the family life they observed among their friends and siblings who had children, which was also reported by Högbäck (2008). One of the participants expressed a motivating factor that has not been reported in any of the extant literature reviewed, namely that he did not want to grow old alone like so many other single people in his life.

Another motivation reported by the VSFs was to cultivate a legacy. They believed that fatherhood could serve as their legacy while bringing meaning to their lives. When reflecting on their legacy, some participants spoke of wanting to improve the fathering practices they experienced growing up. This need was also reported in Seeman's (2018) literature review on single heterosexual men seeking adoption, who wanted to model better fatherhood and make up for how they were fathered.

From a TBPB stance within SDT, this theme strongly correlates with the basic motivational needs of autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The single fathers made independent and self-determined decisions to achieve their dreams of becoming fathers, which fulfilled their basic psychological need for autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, they were driven by a need for relatedness to others, especially a child and family of their own. Creating a family, albeit with a different structure that is not as widely seen, fulfilled their basic psychological need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

#### ***2.4.2 Capabilities of single fathers: Driven by the basic psychological need of competence***

The second theme, *Capabilities of single fathers*, illustrated how the participants' beliefs in their capability to be single fathers motivated them to choose an alternate way to become fathers. They reflected on how they valued their own characteristics and capabilities.

All the VSFs stated the importance of fathers providing nurturing care to their children, not just financial provision. They emphasised that fathers must be able to express their emotions and show love to their children. These sentiments correspond with the reported shift in fatherhood perceptions, where fathers are expected to be more nurturing and to incorporate caring masculinity traits in their identities (Elliott, 2016; Moodley & Lesch, 2024; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). The participants further spoke of their joy when caring for someone, which enhanced their confidence in their own parenting skills. Similar accounts were reported in research on stay-at-home-fathers (SAHF), where fathers are the primary caregivers to their

children (Beglaubter, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018). By engaging in caring practices, the SAHF reported feeling more competent as primary caregivers and finding their roles as fathers more enjoyable (Beglaubter, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018). Interestingly, some of the VSFs in the current study linked their more nurturing tendencies to their homosexual identity, stating that gay men are inherently more nurturing. Although this could be interpreted as displaying caring masculinity traits, it might perpetuate HM ideals where minority masculinities, such as gay men, are seen as more feminine and deemed subordinate to traditional HM (Amato, 2018).

The VSF participants spoke of their resilience due to past challenges that they had overcome. Again, some participants related this to their sexuality, reflecting on the discrimination that they have endured. However, knowing that they were able to work through past difficult situations increased their motivation to go through another challenging process, namely becoming a VSF. Carroll (2018) similarly found that the minority group of gay fathers interviewed reported that they had to develop resilience due to past stigma they have experienced, as did the Israeli gay fathers who took part in Maya and Adital's (2019) research. The participants in Carroll's (2018) study framed their experience positively, stating that they were proud of their accomplishments and celebrated their competence as sole primary caregivers. Some of the older VSF participants in the current study spoke of resilience factors they have developed over the years from general life experience and not due to specific stigma they faced. They felt that being older was beneficial and that they were better equipped to be fathers from their extensive life experience.

All the participants acknowledged the financial means necessary to become a single father, but more importantly, the importance of having social support. For all of them, having the resources they needed for the process of becoming single fathers increased their motivation to do so, and their confidence that they were capable. The importance of social support was also

reported by the VSFs interviewed by Carone et al. (2017), as well as the Black single fathers who participated in Kabongo and Malose's (2015) study.

This main theme of *Capabilities of single fathers* links with the basic psychological need for competence, seen as a strong motivating factor in the TBP. The single fathers knew they had the personal attributes, resilience, and social support to choose their respective journeys to fatherhood, and therefore, they felt competent to do so (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Bouchard et al. (2007) and Ross-Plourde and Basque (2019) reported similar results, showing that prospective parents who made a self-determined decision to become parents led to an increased sense of competence, and ultimately more parental satisfaction after their children were born.

#### **2.4.3 Pathways towards volunteer single fathering: Driven by the basic psychological needs of competence and autonomy**

The theme *Pathways towards volunteer single fathering* illustrated the participants' options to become single fathers and their decision-making when considering the available pathways. Having options to choose from increased their motivation to follow an alternate path towards parenthood, as they realised their need to become parents could indeed be fulfilled. This was also reported by the Israeli fathers who participated in Maya and Adital's (2018) study. It was found that the availability of different options increased the participants' sense of autonomy and resilience to continue with the process of surrogacy (Maya & Adital, 2018).

Some participants reflected on their experience of having to change their initial ideas about becoming fathers. They stated that they felt they had to start their journey soon, as they were concerned that they would miss out on their children's lives if they were too old, as Carone et al. (2017) also reported.

The one participant who chose surrogacy as his route to parenthood shared his preference for a genetic relationship with his child. This preference was also reported in the overview of the literature on VSFs by Pereira and Beatriz (2023), by the VSFs who took part in Carone et al.'s (2017) study and the fathers interviewed by Blake et al. (2017). For the other

VSF participants who chose adoption as their route, it was not important to have a genetic link with their children. This is again similar to findings reported by Blake et al. (2017), who noted that not all the fathers in the surrogacy families desired a genetic relationship with their children. Some participants in the current study stated that they preferred adoption to surrogacy, echoing findings reported by Luyt and Swartz (2023).

A unique finding in the current study was that the participants compared their experience to what couples go through when becoming parents, having similar doubts and challenges. They made the decision to start a family, just like couples or other prospective parents might, and the journey to parenthood can be challenging regardless of the pathway you choose. This gave them comfort and boosted their confidence that they would be able to go through the process since so many others have gone through similar experiences.

Looking through an SDT lens and the TBP, this theme of *Pathways towards volunteer single fathering* speaks to the basic need for competency. When one feels confident in one's decision, it often leads to feeling competent enough to undertake the planned journey (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This theme is even more strongly related to the basic need for autonomy. Having different pathways available and the option to make their own decisions, is directly linked with being autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

#### **2.4.4 Advocacy for myself and those to follow: Driven by the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, relatedness**

Within the last theme of *Advocacy for myself and those to follow*, it was evident that the participants had a strong drive to showcase their experiences of using alternative avenues to parenthood. They wanted to raise awareness of the different possibilities available for men to become fathers, acting as role models and inspirations for others.

Promoting the visibility of VSFs featured in much of the extant literature on this phenomenon. Pereira and Beatriz (2023) aimed to showcase positive models of surrogacy as a pathway to fatherhood, and Carroll (2018) reported that the single father participants were

frustrated at the public's lack of awareness of adoption as a possibility for single men to become fathers. Raising awareness of the options available to men to become VSFs might lead to more potential caregivers and possibly more children receiving care (Carroll, 2018; Rochat et al., 2016).

Participants further reported that their decisions were motivated by wanting to challenge society's perceptions of men's capabilities to be fathers, and specifically single fathers. Most participants voiced frustration at the responses they received when telling others of their decision to become single fathers. When sharing their news, they were often met with scepticism and insinuations that a mother is essential when raising a child. The Italian fathers who took part in Carone et al.'s (2017; 2020) studies similarly reported being confronted with concerns about the absence of a mother caregiver (Carone et al., 2020) and experienced stigma due to being part of a VSF minority group (Carone et al., 2017). This also motivated the VSFs to challenge societal expectations of gender roles (Carone et al., 2017, 2020). The Israeli VSFs interviewed by Maya and Adital (2018) reported similar stigmatisation and expressed that they were not afraid to criticise the hegemonic heteronormative model of parenthood as couplehood. The marginalisation of VSFs due to heteronormativity and traditional ideas of gender roles were also discussed by Pereira and Beatriz (2023) and found to be motivating factors for VSFs to pursue fatherhood.

The potential of VSF families to challenge society's perceptions of parenthood being synonymous with motherhood could be an important tool to facilitate change in societal views on parenting and gender (Pereira & Beatriz, 2023). Highlighting VSF family forms may encourage the deconstruction of traditional gender ideology, which perpetuates the continued hegemony of heteronormative nuclear family forms (Pereira & Beatriz, 2023). Within South African fatherhood literature, the potential for transforming societal ideas around gender through fatherhood has been discussed (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Morrell et al., 2016; Morrell & Jewkes, 2011). It was proposed that framing paternal caring and nurturing activities as part of

providing for their families and encouraging fathers to incorporate caring masculinity traits as part of their masculine identities may lead to the development of more gender-equitable ideas (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Morrell et al., 2016; Morrell & Jewkes, 2011).

The VSFs also advocated for themselves, proving they could be sole primary caregivers. They also wanted to prove that they could provide adequate care to those who expressed concern about the absence of a mother figure. Seeman's (2018) literature review on single fathers noted that single fathers are sufficient at providing care, at times even more so than couples and other single parents. The increase in fatherhood literature on new fatherhood practices that include nurturing and caring activities reinforces the idea that men are capable primary caregivers (Beglaubter, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018; Morrell et al., 2016). In the research on SAHF mentioned earlier, it was reported that fathers as primary caregivers provided the nurture and care traditionally seen as feminine activities (Beglaubter, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018). The psychological well-being of these SAHFs also improved due to their engagement in caring activities, which led to stronger emotional bonds with their children as well as exhibiting more caring attitudes towards their children (Beglaubter, 2019; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018). Morrell et al. (2016) also reported that the South African fathers they interviewed who were engaging in care work extended their caring practices beyond their households and within their communities.

Lastly, the VSFs explained that due to costs and administration involved in their chosen route to fatherhood, they put much thought into their decision and sustained their motivation throughout the sometimes-challenging process. Some participants noted that they could be seen as more prepared than heterosexual couples who may not always go through extended decision-making processes before becoming parents, as in the case of unplanned pregnancies. Furthermore, two participants viewed being single fathers as a benefit since they did not have to negotiate with a partner on parenting styles and discipline, which at times may lead to children

experiencing inconsistent parental care. These findings are unique to the current study and were not reported in other literature on VSFs.

When situating their accounts within an SDT framework, the theme of *Advocacy for myself and those to follow* links with all three pillars of the TBP. As these men made these decisions independently and went through the process alone, they exhibited strong independence and intrinsic motivation, directly correlating with autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). They were also confident in their skills as fathers and their ability to be primary caregivers without having a partner, therefore seeing themselves as competent (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Lastly, this theme strongly links with relatedness, as these men do not only relate to others through their advocacy and showcasing of the available alternate pathways to parenthood for single fathers but also in pursuing parenthood, which will lead to relatedness through the formation of their own family (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The current study is the first in the South African context to focus specifically on VSFs. The explorative research design ensured that the subjective experiences of the participants' decision-making process of becoming single fathers could be obtained.

Some of the narratives of the VSF participants echoed the findings of previous studies conducted in the global north. The participants were motivated to start their own families to seek a purpose and meaning in their own lives and viewed this step as a developmental need. The participants also spoke of their personal capabilities and characteristics, which they believed equipped them to become single fathers who are competent to successfully care for their children. Just like participants in other studies on VSFs who chose adoption or surrogacy as their pathway to becoming parents, the participants reported that learning of the different options available to them motivated them to continue with the process since they could make an autonomous decision. The participants also voiced their frustration with the lack of awareness of these alternate pathways to fatherhood, and they hoped to advocate for the different pathways

available so that more men might learn of these options out there. Lastly, participants also felt strongly about challenging the traditional societal expectations of gender roles. This is important, as it illustrates the potential of fostering more gender-equitable ideals by promoting opportunities for men to engage in care work.

The participants also reported unique outlooks on volunteer single fathering. Some participants viewed their experience of starting a family as analogous to the process couples go through when planning to have children. Another unique finding was that some of the VSF participants viewed being a single father as a benefit because it is less complicated with only one person making decisions on parenting styles and discipline.

The limitations of the study include the small sample size, as well as having only one participant who chose surrogacy as their alternate pathway to parenthood. There may be nuanced differences and dynamics at play in the surrogacy process as compared to the adoption process, which might not have come to light. The participants also reported retrospectively on their decision-making process when choosing their pathways to parenthood, which might not be accurate reflections.

This study can serve as a foundation for future research on this interesting and specific family form. Many factors were discussed that may encourage more men to partake in care work and possibly change problematic societal views on traditional gender roles.

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### **Section C: Critical reflection of the study**

This section provides a critical discussion and reflection on the research study. First, the limitations and strengths of the study will be discussed, followed by potential implications that might arise from the findings of the study. Possible future research that could be informed or developed from the study and a conclusion on the topics discussed will then be given. Lastly, a personal reflection on the process of the study will be provided.

#### **3.1 Limitations**

Due to the highly specific research question and inclusion criteria, purposive and snowball sampling procedures were used to recruit participants. This meant that participants formed part of a distinct group of men with very particular characteristics. A further implication of this specificity was the small sample size, with only five participants taking part. Since the sample of participants is so small and specific, the research findings cannot be generalised to groups that do not share the specific characteristics of the study participants. However, the direct transferability of the findings was not an aim or objective of the study. The explorative nature of the study necessitated rich, in-depth accounts of the participants' motivations to become VSFs. Nonetheless, a larger sample size would have been beneficial to further demonstrate the salience of the findings among the participants.

Another limitation of the study was that the narratives of the participants were all retrospective accounts. All participants had to think back to between four and ten years ago, relying on their memories of their decision-making process when choosing to become VSFs. At times, participants stated that they could not remember clearly what their thought processes were at that time. This may mean that their accounts were not always accurate reflections of the process they went through so many years ago.

Of the five participants, only one became a VSF through the process of surrogacy and was the biological father of his child. In most of the international literature on VSFs, surrogacy was the chosen alternate pathway to becoming a single father. It was reported in these studies

that being the biological father and contributing genetically to their children were important to the participants. Since only one participant in the current study is the biological father of his child, the potential role that being genetically related to their child may play in men's motivation for becoming VSFs was not fully explored in this study.

Lastly, a possible further limitation was that four of the interviews were conducted via online platforms. Due to network complications, there were audio delays at times, hindering the flow of the conversation. During two interviews, the video function had to be switched off due to connectivity issues, which meant that the researcher and participant could not rely on non-verbal communication in their interactions. Although people are more comfortable using online platforms since the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher found that the warmth and human connection during the one in-person interview improved the interaction with the participant.

### **3.2 Strengths of the Study**

The main strength of the study is the novelty of the research topic within the South African context. No other research study on VSFs was found in the extant South African literature on fatherhood. Future research on VSFs could therefore build on the findings presented here.

Another strength of the study is the in-depth exploration of the motivations of the VSFs who took part in the study. This was possible due to the nature of qualitative research, where semi-structured interviews are utilised to collect data. The small sample size, albeit hindering the direct transferability of the findings, ensured that the researcher could spend more time on the interviews to illicit rich narratives from the participants. The transcription process and data analysis could be done meticulously since there were only a few interviews to transcribe and analyse, and therefore not many time constraints.

A further strength of the study is that it illuminates the unique experience of men who choose to become single fathers. This may raise awareness for other potential VSFs, who might not even be aware of the possible pathways available to them in this country to become fathers.

Lastly, this study shows that men also desire to nurture and care for their children. It is not only the mother's or female caregiver's domain. The participants' accounts also show that single fathers are capable of nurturing and caring parenting practices. The VSFs, therefore, contest the traditional view of gender roles, contributing to the fostering of more gender-equitable ideas in a country where levels of gender inequality and gender-based violence are of great concern.

### **3.3 Implications**

There are various family structures in South Africa, different to the normative Western ideal of nuclear families, such as households with single fathers as the primary caregivers to their children. This study was the first to explore the specific family structure of VSFs in the South African context by looking at the motivations of men who choose to become VSFs through adoption or surrogacy. New knowledge was therefore generated on this specific type of family structure. This knowledge could inform policymakers when implementing programmes to support single fathers in South Africa effectively.

This study may also raise awareness of alternate pathways to becoming a father, that a single man does not need a partner to start their own family. Awareness of this possibility may encourage others to partake in similar journeys as the participants in this study. With regards to adoption, this may lead to more potential adoptive fathers and, therefore, more opportunities to offer care to children who do not have a primary caregiver. It has also been found that providing care and performing caring activities is especially beneficial to the psychological well-being of fathers. Encouraging men to become primary caregivers may, therefore, be beneficial to their mental health as well.

Lastly, men who choose to become single fathers challenge gender stereotypes. Highlighting men who are primary caregivers of their children, could encourage gender-equitable ideas by challenging the traditional notion of care being a feminine activity. In South

Africa, with high rates of gender-based violence, it is imperative to foster the development of gender equality, as mentioned above.

### **3.4 Recommendations for future research**

This explorative study provides a glimpse into the motivations of five men who chose to become VSFs and lays a foundation for further enquiry into this specific family form. Firstly, future studies would benefit from a larger sample size to determine whether the findings in the current study feature among more VSFs in the South African context. It was not in the scope of the current study to determine whether men from different social contexts or geographical areas had different motivations for becoming VSFs. Future studies may explore this to gain more insight into the decision-making process of men who become VSFs.

It could be interesting to distinguish between the different pathways to becoming VSFs, namely via adoption or surrogacy, in future research. There may be unique differences in the motivations of men who choose different alternative pathways to becoming fathers.

Lastly, the current study focused on the motivations at play when participants decided to become VSFs. Future research may explore the parenting experiences of VSFs, such as the challenges they face, their parenting styles, and the differences in parenting experiences compared to other family forms. Longitudinal studies could also explore the psychological well-being of children raised by VSFs, as well as the well-being of the VSFs themselves.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the motivations of men who choose to become VSFs via alternate pathways to starting a family, such as adoption or surrogacy. It was found that when analysing the participants' narratives, aspects of the TBPn were at play during the decision-making process when the VSFs decided to finally embark on their journeys to becoming fathers. All the motivating factors reported by the participants were underpinned by the three basic psychological needs proposed in the TBPn with the SDT framework, namely, a need for being autonomous, a need for feeling competent, and a need for relatedness with others.

### **3.6 Personal Reflections**

I was excited to embark on this research journey as I found my topic intriguing. I am very interested in masculinity studies, and I believe fatherhood is a dynamic practice with the potential to be used as a starting point to bring about significant societal changes.

Although I was very passionate about my topic and excited to delve into the research process, I was soon reminded of how lonely and isolating conducting research can be. The recruitment of participants was especially challenging. I also soon realised the participants had limited availability, which makes sense as they are single parents, and it would, therefore, also take quite some time to schedule interviews. This meant there were long periods between the interviews I conducted. Personally, I find the narratives of participants in qualitative research to be the most inspiring factor in the process, as they always improve my motivation, which leads to productivity. Therefore, the long periods between interviews had a negative effect on my motivation to work on my research, and it was challenging at times to reignite my passion and interest in my project.

However, it is always invigorating to hear someone's story, and I believe interesting findings emerged from the participants' reflections. I hope this study can inspire future research to develop further and explore the topics raised by the participants.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Data on national adoptions from 2013 to 2021

Adapted from data on the Newlands Therapy Centre website, which was provided to the website owner via email by the Registrar of Adoptions (Mr Chavalala) on 28 April 2022 (Luyt, n.d.).

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Related/family<br/>adoption</i> |           | <i>Unrelated<br/>adoption</i> |            | <i>Stepparent<br/>adoption</i> |            | <i>Unspecified</i> |            | <i>Total</i> |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| <i>2013</i> | <i>24</i>                          | <i>9%</i> | <i>101</i>                    | <i>40%</i> | <i>29</i>                      | <i>11%</i> | <i>100</i>         | <i>39%</i> | <i>254</i>   |
| <i>2014</i> | <i>59</i>                          | <i>4%</i> | <i>1232</i>                   | <i>86%</i> | <i>137</i>                     | <i>10%</i> | <i>7</i>           | <i>0%</i>  | <i>1435</i>  |
| <i>2015</i> | <i>28</i>                          | <i>2%</i> | <i>1208</i>                   | <i>87%</i> | <i>142</i>                     | <i>10%</i> | <i>11</i>          | <i>1%</i>  | <i>1389</i>  |
| <i>2016</i> | <i>39</i>                          | <i>3%</i> | <i>1159</i>                   | <i>87%</i> | <i>121</i>                     | <i>9%</i>  | <i>14</i>          | <i>1%</i>  | <i>1333</i>  |
| <i>2017</i> | <i>26</i>                          | <i>2%</i> | <i>1090</i>                   | <i>86%</i> | <i>138</i>                     | <i>11%</i> | <i>12</i>          | <i>1%</i>  | <i>1266</i>  |



## Appendix B: Study information leaflet



### ADVERTISEMENT

#### Single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice

A student from the University of the Free State Psychology Department is conducting research on the experiences of and motivations for men who chose to become single fathers via surrogacy or adoption. This research study forms part of the requirements for the Master in Social Sciences degree in Clinical Psychology.

#### **Participation is voluntary, strictly confidential and anonymous.**

You will be asked to take part in an individual interview, as well as to complete a reflective writing exercise a month after the interview has taken place.

#### **Requirements for participation**

- A male who chose to become a single father via surrogacy or adoption.
- You must be your child's primary caregiver.
- You must be English-speaking.
- You must reside in the Bloemfontein or Cape Winelands area, or have access to an online platform for the interview to be conducted via a video call.

If you are interested to participate or you would like more information, please contact the researcher:

Marié le Roux

Contact number: 083 290 7714

Email address: [miemieleroux@gmail.com](mailto:miemieleroux@gmail.com)

HPCSA registration: PSIN 0163090

Ethical clearance number: UFS-HSD2021/0993/21/22



## Appendix C: Participant informed consent form



### RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

#### **DATE**

December 2021 – December 2023

#### **TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

Single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice.

#### **PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):**

Name of student: Marié le Roux

Student number: 2020047243

Contact number: 063 949 2790

Email address: miemieleroux@gmail.com

#### **FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:**

Faculty of Humanities, Psychology department.

#### **STUDY LEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:**

Name of study leader: Dr L Nel

Contact number: 051 401 2732

Email address: nelli@ufs.ac.za

#### **WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

The aim of this study is to explore and describe the experiences of and motivations for men choosing to become single parents via surrogacy or adoption.

#### **WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?**

My name is Marié le Roux. I am a master's student in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Free State. This research project forms part of my degree.

#### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?**

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

**Approval number:** *Insert approval number*

**For any enquiries regarding the ethical approval of this study, please contact:**

Ms. Charné Vercueil

Contact number: 051 401 7083

Email address:



### THE REASONS YOU HAVE BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT.

You have been invited to take part in this research project as you responded to an information flyer given to you by someone you know or sent to you by a fertility clinic or adoption agency.

You have been invited to take part in the research project because:

- You are an English-speaking male.
- You chose to become a father via surrogacy or adoption when you were not in a romantic relationship.
- Your child(ren) (born via surrogacy or adopted) is between the ages of two and five-years-old.
- You are the primary caregiver of your child(ren).

A total of six single-father participants will take part in this research project.

### WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Participating in the study involves the following two procedures:

1. You will be interviewed in-person or via video call by the researcher at a time and place which is most convenient to you. The interview will last between 60 to 90 minutes and will be recorded to transcribe the conversation. The questions asked will be about your experiences of and motivation for choosing to become a single parent via surrogacy or adoption. Questions on basic demographic information will also be asked.
2. A month after the interview took place, you will be asked to write a reflective writing exercise to describe your experience of taking part in this study. This can be emailed to the researcher. You may be asked to take part in a follow-up individual interview if necessary to clarify anything.

### CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You may withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. Should you withdraw from the study, the information that we received from you will be destroyed.

### WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The findings from this study will provide knowledge and a better understanding of the experiences of and motivations for choosing to become a single father via surrogacy or adoption. This knowledge may lead to better support within communities for this specific group of men. Furthermore, highlighting such caring behaviours by men may lead to a change in society's ideas about gender roles.

### WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

It may be challenging to speak about certain aspects of fatherhood. Should you become aware of any personal or family problems during the research with which you may need assistance or guidance, the researcher will refer you to a professional or student clinical or counselling psychologist in your area. The researcher will pay for a maximum of three sessions with a professional psychologist, if necessary. You may also contact the following organisations who provide free counselling services:

LifeLine: 0861 322 322

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group: 0800 567 567

Local government clinic: *applicable contact details will be provided depending on participant's location*

#### **WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Your identity will remain confidential by using a pseudonym which will only be known to the researcher. All printed information will be kept in a locked cabinet. In any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings, a pseudonym will be used when referring to your answers and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded using a voice recorder, or the video call will be recorded. All electronic recordings will be stored on a computer and external hard drive that is password protected. If transcribers are going to be used to make transcriptions of the recordings, they will sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure your identity remains confidential.

It is required by law and professional standards that all information about child neglect, abuse, and possible physical injuries to people be reported to the relevant professional authorities. You will be informed if the researcher must report such information to the relevant authorities.

#### **HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in the researcher's home for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After a period of five years, the hard copies will be shredded, and electronic information permanently deleted.

#### **WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

There will not be any payment or incentives offered for participating in this study. If the interview takes place via a video call, you will receive a voucher for 1GB of data from your preferred network provider (MTN, Vodacom, Cell-C, or Telkom).

#### **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings or require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Marié le Roux on 063 949 2790 or [miemieleroux@gmail.com](mailto:miemieleroux@gmail.com). Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr. L Nel on 051 401 2732 or [nelli@ufs.ac.za](mailto:nelli@ufs.ac.za), or Ms. Charmé Vercueil on 051 401 7083.

**Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.**

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, the undersigned,

\_\_\_\_\_ (participant's full names to be included), (the  
"Participant")

confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as:

Single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice

(the "Study") in relation to

an individual interview conducted in-person or via video call, as well as a reflective writing exercise to be  
completed one month after the individual interview

and which Study is being conducted by

\_\_\_\_\_ Marié le Roux

(the "Researcher").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study.
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet.
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study.
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing, and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto.
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein.
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage.
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the in-person interview/video call (circle applicable method).

Full Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D: Interview schedule

**Interview schedule:** Single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice.

Marié le Roux

2020047243

- The researcher introduces herself and summarises the aim of the study.
- Go through the information letter with participants and answer any questions that arise.
- Ask participant to complete and sign the consent form.
- Ask demographic questions.
- After basic demographic questions have been asked, ask the semi-structured interview questions.

**Demographics** (These questions were designed to ensure that participants are eligible for the study and to obtain background information)

|                                                      |  |
|------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Name                                                 |  |
| Age                                                  |  |
| Date of birth                                        |  |
| Contact number                                       |  |
| Home language                                        |  |
| Occupation                                           |  |
| Highest level of education                           |  |
| Population group                                     |  |
| Relationship status                                  |  |
| Sexual orientation                                   |  |
| Child conceived via surrogacy or adoption?           |  |
| If surrogacy, is there a biological link with child? |  |
| Gender of child                                      |  |
| Age of child                                         |  |
| Occupants in dwelling                                |  |

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Other children        |  |
| Age of other children |  |

**Semi-structured interview questions** (These questions were designed to illicit rich descriptions from participants and are to guide the interviewer. Only necessary questions will be asked, and some questions may be used to further probe participants' responses.)

1. What led to you choosing to become a single father?
2. Tell me about any obstacles that you encountered in the process of becoming a single father by choice.
3. This could be a challenging journey. What motivated you to persist despite the challenges you encountered?
4. Why did you choose to become a single father via surrogacy/adoption? (Use wording appropriate to participant's choice.)
5. How do you feel about being a father?
6. How do you experience single fatherhood?
7. What challenges have you experienced as a single father?
8. How did you resolve these challenges?
9. What support systems or resources are available to single fathers?
10. What are your main concerns with being a single father?
11. What gives you hope about being a single father?
12. What were your expectations of becoming a single father?
13. How has what you have experienced been different to these expectations you had?
14. How would you describe yourself as a father?
15. Describe to me the relationship you have with your children. Is there a story you could tell me that would illustrate your relationship with your children?
16. How do you think is being a single father perceived by others?
17. Sometimes a person needs the support of people around them, such as friends, family, and other parents. When you need someone to listen to your problems when you're feeling low, who are the people that you can or do call or talk to?

18. How does your role as a single father fit into your cultural expectation of being a man/father?

### Appendix E: Frequency of codes

|    | Code                                       | Groundedness |
|----|--------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1  | ○ Stigma - single father                   | 40           |
| 2  | ○ Support network                          | 37           |
| 3  | ○ Meaningful experience                    | 31           |
| 4  | ○ Process                                  | 30           |
| 5  | ○ Caring masculinities                     | 29           |
| 6  | ○ Gender roles                             | 27           |
| 7  | ○ I have always wanted to be a father      | 25           |
| 8  | ○ Advocacy                                 | 17           |
| 9  | ○ Altruistic motivation                    | 17           |
| 10 | ○ Challenge - parenting alone              | 17           |
| 11 | ○ Basic need to care for someone           | 16           |
| 12 | ○ Legacy                                   | 15           |
| 13 | ○ Challenge - different racial identity    | 14           |
| 14 | ○ Challenge - financial considerations     | 14           |
| 15 | ○ Private adoption                         | 14           |
| 16 | ○ Relationship with biological family      | 14           |
| 17 | ○ It was meant to be                       | 13           |
| 18 | ○ Single father benefit                    | 12           |
| 19 | ○ A child changes your perspective on life | 11           |
| 20 | ○ Being an older parent is beneficial      | 11           |
| 21 | ○ Gay men are more nurturing               | 10           |
| 22 | ○ Legal procedure                          | 10           |
| 23 | ○ Protective                               | 10           |
| 24 | ○ Reflection on adequacy as a parent       | 10           |
| 25 | ○ Challenge - biological family            | 9            |
| 26 | ○ Stigma - hospital staff                  | 9            |
| 27 | ○ High self-esteem                         | 8            |
| 28 | ○ I am a good parent                       | 8            |
| 29 | ○ Reason for taking part                   | 8            |

|    |                                           |   |
|----|-------------------------------------------|---|
| 30 | ○ Stigma - homophobia                     | 8 |
| 31 | ○ This is my child                        | 8 |
| 32 | ○ Challenge - state adoption              | 7 |
| 33 | ○ I have an amazing child                 | 7 |
| 34 | ○ Influence from upbringing               | 7 |
| 35 | ○ No regrets                              | 7 |
| 36 | ○ Unconditional love from a child         | 7 |
| 37 | ○ Challenges - surrogacy                  | 6 |
| 38 | ○ Parenting is challenging                | 6 |
| 39 | ○ Being a parent is a big responsibility  | 5 |
| 40 | ○ Boundaries and discipline               | 5 |
| 41 | ○ Considered other options                | 5 |
| 42 | ○ Cyber bullying                          | 5 |
| 43 | ○ I have always loved children            | 5 |
| 44 | ○ I wanted a family                       | 5 |
| 45 | ○ Internalised homophobia                 | 5 |
| 46 | ○ It happened very fast                   | 5 |
| 47 | ○ Own father emotionally absent           | 5 |
| 48 | ○ Relationship with surrogate             | 5 |
| 49 | ○ Seeing the world through a child's eyes | 5 |
| 50 | ○ Single father positive experience       | 5 |
| 51 | ○ You are so strong for doing this        | 5 |
| 52 | ○ Adoption preparation                    | 4 |
| 53 | ○ Criteria for child                      | 4 |
| 54 | ○ Detached                                | 4 |
| 55 | ○ Genetic link                            | 4 |
| 56 | ○ Good communication with child           | 4 |
| 57 | ○ I am proud of myself                    | 4 |
| 58 | ○ I was not prepared                      | 4 |
| 59 | ○ Lockdown                                | 4 |
| 60 | ○ No challenges                           | 4 |

|    |                                                                 |   |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 61 | ○ People possibly hid stigma                                    | 4 |
| 62 | ○ Romantic relationship ended                                   | 4 |
| 63 | ○ Seeking attention/social desirability                         | 4 |
| 64 | ○ Support groups                                                | 4 |
| 65 | ○ A child is the greatest gift of your life                     | 3 |
| 66 | ○ Challenge - where will my child go if something happens to me | 3 |
| 67 | ○ Comparison with single mothers                                | 3 |
| 68 | ○ Connection with new parents                                   | 3 |
| 69 | ○ Future separation between parent and child                    | 3 |
| 70 | ○ I did not want to end up alone                                | 3 |
| 71 | ○ I knew what I was letting myself in for                       | 3 |
| 72 | ○ New partner                                                   | 3 |
| 73 | ○ No stigma                                                     | 3 |
| 74 | ○ Parents cannot be idealised                                   | 3 |
| 75 | ○ Past traditional view of nuclear family                       | 3 |
| 76 | ○ Reality TV participant                                        | 3 |
| 77 | ○ Sense of community                                            | 3 |
| 78 | ○ Stability                                                     | 3 |
| 79 | ○ Stigma South Africa                                           | 3 |
| 80 | ○ Surrogacy process                                             | 3 |
| 81 | ○ The focus must be on the child, not the single father         | 3 |
| 82 | ○ Traditional view of father as provider                        | 3 |
| 83 | ○ Trying things out                                             | 3 |
| 84 | ○ Wanting to adopt another child                                | 3 |
| 85 | ○ Adjusting to parenthood                                       | 2 |
| 86 | ○ Challenge - do not know the child's background                | 2 |
| 87 | ○ Challenge - everyone knows, scrutiny                          | 2 |
| 88 | ○ Change idea of being a father                                 | 2 |
| 89 | ○ Coming to terms with sexuality                                | 2 |
| 90 | ○ Dealing with awkward questions                                | 2 |
| 91 | ○ Exceeds expectations                                          | 2 |

|     |                                                            |   |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 92  | ○ Gay men are stronger emotionally                         | 2 |
| 93  | ○ Having fun                                               | 2 |
| 94  | ○ I've always done things differently                      | 2 |
| 95  | ○ Not emotionally attuned                                  | 2 |
| 96  | ○ One child is enough                                      | 2 |
| 97  | ○ Sibling                                                  | 2 |
| 98  | ○ There has never been a need to reflect on the experience | 2 |
| 99  | ○ Biological parents                                       | 1 |
| 100 | ○ Challenge - child only has a father                      | 1 |
| 101 | ○ Challenge - romantic relationships                       | 1 |
| 102 | ○ Choosing adoption                                        | 1 |
| 103 | ○ Closeness grew experientially                            | 1 |
| 104 | ○ Concern about being an old parent                        | 1 |
| 105 | ○ Defensive                                                | 1 |
| 106 | ○ Denial?                                                  | 1 |
| 107 | ○ Different view of parenting when growing up              | 1 |
| 108 | ○ Documenting through social media                         | 1 |
| 109 | ○ Enjoys to reflect on experience                          | 1 |
| 110 | ○ Existentialism                                           | 1 |
| 111 | ○ Future financial considerations                          | 1 |
| 112 | ○ I did it for myself                                      | 1 |
| 113 | ○ I did not think about when the child is older            | 1 |
| 114 | ○ I did not want a child born out of a rape                | 1 |
| 115 | ○ I have never really thought about my motivation          | 1 |
| 116 | ○ I wondered how I will become a parent                    | 1 |
| 117 | ○ I would have preferred the traditional pathway           | 1 |
| 118 | ○ Maternity leave/pregnancy comparison                     | 1 |
| 119 | ○ Not everyone will be able to be a single father          | 1 |
| 120 | ○ Only one role model                                      | 1 |
| 121 | ○ Others eventually accepted the child                     | 1 |
| 122 | ○ Parents may not have approved                            | 1 |

|     |                                                       |   |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 123 | ○ Relationship was not a good environment for a child | 1 |
| 124 | ○ Relationship with child                             | 1 |
| 125 | ○ Researcher reflection                               | 1 |
| 126 | ○ Selfish                                             | 1 |
| 127 | ○ Stigma - adoption                                   | 1 |
| 128 | ○ Surrogacy is a business transaction                 | 1 |
| 129 | ○ Surrogacy is transformative                         | 1 |
| 130 | ○ Surrogacy was not an option                         | 1 |
| 131 | ○ Tired                                               | 1 |

## Appendix F: Ethical Approval GHREC Feedback



### GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

22-Nov-2022

Dear Ms Maria Le Roux

#### Continuation/Report Approved

Research Project Title:

**Single fathering: An exploration of the motivations of South African men who become single parents by choice**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2021/0993/21/22**

We are pleased to inform you that the application to extend your ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**

205 Nelson Mandela  
Drive  
Park West  
Bloemfontein 9301  
South Africa

P.O. Box 339  
Bloemfontein 9300  
Tel: +27 (0)51 401  
9337  
[duplessisA@ufs.ac.za](mailto:duplessisA@ufs.ac.za)  
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*Updated 28th February 2024*

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*by* Maria Le Roux

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