Master thesis

Who cares?

Father-identity, perceived expectations & the gendered division of care for children in South Africa

Hylke Hoornstra - 4246497

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Supervisors:

Prof. Trudie Knijn   -Utrecht University
(Supervising lecturer)

Dr. Mieke Maliepaard   -Utrecht University
(second reader)

Zoheb Khan   -CSDA

Summary:

This research explores how residential, low-income fathers in South Africa perceive their role as a caregiver and how they evaluate and cope with the facilitation and exclusion of caregiving by their partners, in order to understand how mothers influence fathers' views on and performance of their father-roles. The fathers' evaluation of the mothers' influence is approached from theory on father-roles and *maternal gatekeeping*. The results help to better understand and solve problems with the lacking participation of fathers in caregiving in South Africa. The results are drawn from qualitative interviews with 15 residential (substitute) fathers from the Johannesburg area. The data show three main results. (1) Most fathers seem willing to participate in caregiving, though most see themselves primarily as a financial provider and a secondary caregiver. (2) While the majority the fathers complied with the perceived expectations through *gate-opening* and *gate-closing* behaviour by mothers, there were some cases where fathers resisted the increased or restricted caregiving role the mother saw for them. (3) Fathers also recognised other influences that limited or enabled their ability to become a more involved caregiver, in particular the extent to which they are successful in performing their ´provider role´ and social pressure to conform to (traditional) hegemonic masculinity. This research provides empirical support to nearly all of the theoretical ways *gatekeeping* mothers influence whether and how fathers perform their caregiving role. However, it also demonstrates that these influences never operate in isolation.

Keywords: *Maternal gatekeeping, father-roles, low-income families, South Africa & care for to children*

Contents

1. Introduction

The father-role in post-apartheid South-Africa has been a heavily debated and researched subject (Morrell & Richter, 2006). The father-role in South-African society now is different from the way it was before and during colonization and apartheid. Fatherhood among black South-Africans used to be a position of respect and power, which came with responsibilities like providing guidance and material needs, protection and involvement in caring (Lesejane, 2006). This form of fatherhood, where fathers were involved with the children and family life, was disrupted by colonization and missionary practices. Through the outlawing of certain cultural practices, migrant work in the mining industry and infantilisation of black South-Africans during apartheid, the old form of the involved father through paternal responsibilities disappeared. What remains now is a highly unequal, gendered division of tasks and a form of paternity with little responsibilities and reciprocity (Lesejane, 2006; Morrell, 2006). Nowadays, expectations of fatherhood mostly revolve around being a provider. Because of high poverty and unemployment and traditional gender roles in South-Africa, many fathers are unable to fulfil their provider and either abandon or are excluded from family life. Leaving mothers with the responsibility to both provide and care for their children (Morell & Richter, 2006). The South-African welfare system has taken multiple measures since the abolishment of apartheid that were intended to improve living conditions for children and improve gender-equality, like the Child Support Grant (CSG) and legislation of women's rights as a defence against being abused or oppressed (Lund, 2008; Shefer, et al.,2008). Despite changes over the last decades and attempts to address gender inequality and cultural norms about division of power in the household in South-Africa. There however remain a high number of absent fathers and present fathers who don't participate in caregiving, men also often maintain the dominant position, with a submissive role for women (Pettifor, MacPhail, Anderson, & Maman, 2012; Shefer, et al., 2008).

This thesis will address the unequal division of caring for children that is being held in place by stereotypes and gender-norms about the division of power and care for children within households. Doherty (1991) called to challenge stereotypical thinking about the abilities of men[1], similarly as to how feminism challenged deficit-paradigms about the abilities of women. Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) picked up on Doherty's call to challenge stereotypes about the inadequacy of men e.g.: *Women should do the majority if not all of the child-caring, because they are more suited to do so*. According to Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) such a stereotype unjustly implies that men are not equipped to take care of children, and that this perspective was used to justify the exclusion and

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[1] Both exaggerated abilities or deficit thinking about fathers' ability to nurture and care.

lack of participation of men in caring for children, by men and women alike. Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) argue that deficit-thinking about fathers' abilities as caregiver might convince fathers themselves that they are ill-suited to perform certain caring tasks and might convince mothers to look at them as a supporting parent rather than a co-parent. It narrows the views on how the father-role can be performed, often limiting involvement to being little more than a breadwinner. Over the last decades these stereotypes have been challenged throughout the world, through cultural change and changing masculinities - ideas about what kind of characteristics and actions make 'a man'- and attempts to improve gender equality (Connell, 2012). However, traditional ideas about the abilities of fathers remain widespread in many societies (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Doorten, 2008; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Marsigle, Day & Lamb, 2000; McBride, et al., 2005; Redpath, Morrell, Jewkes & Peacock, 2008). These ideas feed into the following line of reasoning:

- Social ideas about fathers as a caregiver influence how they look at themselves as a caregiver (Felson, 1995; Maurer, Pleck & Rane, 2001).
- These ideas also influence interactions with and behaviour of significant others; the mothers' beliefs whether fathers can or should perform caring tasks might entice them to perform a certain form of gatekeeping. *Gate-opening* if they trust the fathers´ caring capabilities and *gate-closing* if they do not (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Beernink, 2012; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Makusha & Richter, 2015; McBride et al., 2005; Trinder, 2008).

Such assumptions about fathers being unsuited for performing caring tasks seem to also remain strong in South-Africa (Beernink, 2012; Makusha & Richter, 2015; Morrell & Richter, 2006).

This thesis primarily addresses the father-role in providing care for children in low-income families, as perceived by the father, in relation to the mothers' expectations. This leads to a two-part theoretical framework. Firstly, the theory on masculinity, caring roles and father identity. Secondly, since identity is a social construction, this thesis approaches how fathers perceive the interaction with others about their caring-roles, particularly mothers. A symbolic-interactionism perspective informs this part of the study, more specifically Cooley's *Looking-Glass* (Cooley, 1992). This framework concludes with some remarks on the limitations of these theories.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Fatherhood and caring tasks
Traditional notions of fatherhood have increasingly been challenged at the end of the 20th century. Cebrera, Tamis-Lemonda, Bradley, Hofferth and Lamb (2000) summarize this change with

four social trends in the US: increased women's participation on the labour market, increased number of non-residential fathers, increased involvement of fathers in intact families and increased cultural diversity in the US which increased the variance of what 'good fathering' means. They describe the change from a distant breadwinner, to a modern involved father and finally a co-parent. They see a wider definition of fatherhood, with on the one hand increasing participation and responsibility of fathers in the caring of their child, but on the other hand complete absence of other fathers with the increase of single-parent families (Cebrera, et al., 2000). This is an example of changes in masculinity that are seen mostly in modern, western countries. Masculinities however differ per continent and culture (Connell, 2012). And while similar trends towards more egalitarian division of care for children can be seen throughout the world, almost everywhere around the world taking care of children remains the main responsibility for women (Cebrera, et al., 2000; Connell, 2012; Doorten, 2008; Richter & Morrell, 2006). Differences in culturally defined masculinities are often simplified to traditional (patriarchal) and modern (expressive and egalitarian) masculinity (Connell, 2012). The increasing need to involve fathers in the caring for children comes from women's' increasing participation in paid work and ideological challenges of the dichotomy between gender-roles and tasks. This would mean that men and women no longer operate solely in their own gendered spheres with their own tasks, but these spheres start to increasingly overlap (Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2000; Mavungu, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013). Masiglo et al. (2000) provide a conceptualization with four different features of a fathers' involvement in family life, viz. (1) providing nurturance and care, (2*)* moral and ethical guidance, (3) emotional, practical and psychological support for the mother and (4) economic provision. Fathers might attribute different weights of importance to these different features (Marsiglo, et al., 2000). For studying caregiving fatherhood this implies that fathers might choose to focus primarily on one or two of these. Furthermore, caring itself can take different forms.

In addition, Fisher and Tronto (1990) described providing care in three phases*; caring about, taking care of* and *caregiving*. (1) *Caring about* is about love and affection, and also about the orientation of care (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). And while *caring about* does not necessarily involve actual action or skill, it is guided by knowledge and understanding of the care receivers needs (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Overall it comes down to what the caregiver thinks is important for the care-receiver. (2) *Taking care of* is mostly and organizational caring role, it implies giving care by taking responsibility (decision making) and providing (financial) resources for initiating and maintaining care, while not necessarily providing care in person (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). The ability to *take care of* is dependent on available resources and the power to make choices about who and how care is provided (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). And lastly (3) *caregiving*, this is the personal hands-on taking care

of the care-receiver (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). This form of providing care often involves demands time-commitment and sufficient skill to provide the needed care and it is dependent on the available resources. In combination with the forms of father involvement described by Marsiglo et al. (2000) and Fisher and Tronto's (1990) forms of caregiving give insight into how the fathers' fulfill their caring responsibilities towards the child.

Similar changes to those seen in western cultures, as mentioned above, are visible in the development of masculinities and expectations of fathers in South-Africa, and while some fathers embrace these developments and alternative masculinities, there is also resistance against these attempts to create more equality in gender and power relations (Makusha & Richter, 2015; Pettifor, et al., 2012; Walker, 2005). Even though changes are visible, South African *hegemonic masculinity* remains, with the father as an authoritative figure and responsibilities that resolve mostly around being a provider and protector (Connell, 2012; Morrell, 2006; Shefer, et al., 2008), valuing these roles over other forms of father involvement (Marsinglo, Day & Lamb, 2002). *Hegemonic masculinity* describes the culturally most valued form of masculinity and presents a model of how ´real men´ should behave, characterised by the oppression of alternative masculinities and women (Connell, 2012; Morrell, 1998). Because of poverty and unemployment many South African fathers, especially in poorer circles, cannot provide and have difficulties in fulfilling the normative standards of *hegemonic masculinity* and if they feel they cannot fulfil this obligation, this often leads to the belief they have no role to play, and then to abandonment of their families. This adds to a common image of many fathers as being 'deadbeat', non-caring parents[2] (Morrell & Richter, 2006; Peacock & Botha, 2006; Redpath, et al., 2008). Much literature on South-African fathers has been focused on *physical* absence of fathers but little on *emotional* absence. This is relevant because physical presence alone does not necessarily mean that the father contributes to caregiving and has a positive influence on the child (Morrell & Richter, 2006; Mavungu, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013). This thesis will look at fathers who are physically present but not necessarily actively and emotionally available for their children.

Fathers' own views on their father role are often in line with gender-roles and masculine ideals; a father who should provide and ensure the survival of the family, while the mothers are the ones naturally suited to perform household and caring tasks (Mavungu, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013). Even though not all fathers dismiss the idea of increased responsibility in care-giving for the child, Mavangu and Thomas-de Boor (2013) found that caring fathers could mostly be found

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[2] This image of 'bad dads' goes beyond inability or unwillingness to provide and perform caring roles and is being reinforced by fathers who are violent and have harmful effects on mothers and children.

among fathers who already fulfil the provider role. Furthermore, it is relevant that South-African cultural norms and views on fathers performing caring tasks also influence whether fathers are willing to be seen as performing caring tasks, or believe themselves as being capable of performing these tasks (Makusha & Richter, 2015; Morrell & Richter, 2006). Research on the fathers' desires to participate has shown that there are fathers who are not following the path of hegemonic masculinity. Some show to be willing to be a father to their children, who experience the positive effects of having a bond with their children. And those fathers' who experience damaging effects, like depression, of being refused access or the freedom to create a meaningful relationship with their children (Mavungu, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013; Nelson, 2004). Research on the experiences of young South African fathers has shown that members of the extended family were often perceived as least helpful to the relationship between these fathers and their child(ren). Often by being excluded by the mother's family, who decided the father is not 'good enough' (Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

In brief, social change, cultural norms and personal desires influence the fathers' convictions perceptions of 'good' fathering, their privileges, their perceived capabilities and their willingness to perform caring tasks. These factors also determine how important fathers believe caring to be as compared to other parenting roles typically ascribed to the father, like breadwinning, protecting and providing moral guidance (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996; Marsigle, Day & Lamb, 2000; Morrell, 2006).

2.2 Symbolic interactionism and gatekeeping behaviour

In addition to the father's own beliefs about his masculinity and his role as a caring parent, there is also the influence from others. With his '*Looking-Glass Self*' theory, the social-interactionist Cooley (1992) argues that what we believe we are is a reflection of the opinions we think others have about us. He describes this as a three-step process:

'...(1) the imagination of our appearance to the other person (2) the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and (3) some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification.'(Cooley, 1992: 184).

Through these steps Cooley (1992) argues that the imaginations of how people perceive one another are the solid facts of society, and furthermore that people use these imaginations as modes to deny or confirm the rightness of their behaviour. An example of how this argument would work in practice, is that a person knocks on a door before entering, because otherwise he might be perceived as being rude, which would leave him feeling ashamed. Cooley (1992) continues to state that this is especially influenced from within the 'primary group', like a family or a household, so especially the beliefs of those close to one influence how one perceives oneself. This has found strong support within symbolic-interactionist research (Collins & Makowsky, 2010; LaRossa &

Reitzes, 2009; Maurer, et al., 2001). Research in this field by Maurer et al. (2001) and McBride (2005) suggests that, in the context of mothers influencing fathers, future research on this subject should give insight into how fathers experience support or criticism from their spouses in the performance of caring roles.

Part of the research on *maternal gatekeeping* shows the influence mothers' attitudes and behaviour can have on the fathers' involvement in caring tasks and father-identity. Allen and Hawkins (1999) defined *maternal gatekeeping* in three parts: (1) mothers' reluctance to relinquish responsibility over family matters, (2) external validation of a mothering identity, and (3) differentiated conceptions of family roles. While Allen and Hawkins (1999) focused mostly on the mothers' negative role by limiting the father involvement, Trinder (2008) broadened these ideas with a model of four different types of *maternal gatekeeping*; pro-active gate-opening, contingent gate-opening, passive gate-opening and gate-closing with respect to household tasks that were traditionally prescribed to women (Trinder, 2008), through which mothers manage and moderate the responsibilities by either encouraging or limiting the fathers' involvement in family work (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Trinder, 2008). For the operationalization of the different aspects of *maternal gatekeeping* the variety of gatekeeping forms as described by Trinder (2008) and applied by Beernink (2012), will be used and adjusted for this study of caring by residential fathers. This can be viewed in the table below (Trinder, 2008, p 1315);

	Pro-active gate opening	Contingent gate opening	Passive gate opening	Justifiable + pro-active gate closing
Parental relationship	Friendly & managed contact	Managed conflict	Disengaged with episodic conflict	Chronic sometimes escalating conflict
Maternal perception of paternal competence & commitment	Good or good-enough fathering	Good-enough father (with scrutiny), some commitment	Limited competence and commitment	Harsh and insensitive parenting
Child welfare discourses	Current child welfare	Current child welfare	Traditional child welfare	Current child welfare (exercised by self, not other partner)
Role security and role bargains	Maternal facilitation + paternal acceptance	Maternal facilitation + paternal acceptance	Maternal non-facilitation + paternal acceptance	Maternal non-facilitation + paternal non-acceptance

This table provides overview of the indicators Trinder (2008) used to identify the different kinds of gatekeeping. Firstly, the *parental relationship:* the better the relationship between the parents, the more likely the mother is to involve or stimulate the father's involvement. Secondly, *the*

maternal perception of the fathers' competence, in which mothers´ assessment of the fathers´ abilities determines whether and in what kind of tasks they influence father-involvement. Thirdly, the *mother´s beliefs about the child´s needs,* where mothers with a more traditional view might question the value of paternal involvement in giving care. And lastly the *role acceptance*, concerning the father´s acceptance of- or resistance against involvement or exclusion by the mother. Maninno and Deutsch (2007) furthermore found that mothers' attempts to increase involvement of fathers in caring and household led to a more significant and more enduring change in the fathers' involvement. McBride et al. (2005) used this broader interpretation of *gatekeeping - i.e.* not only in *limiting* but as well as in *encouraging* involvement - as a starting point for researching mothers' perceptions on fatherhood and their impact on *residential fathers'* involvement in family life. Not only did they find support that the mothers' perception on good fathering played an important role in regulating the fathers' involvement, but they also confirmed that the mothers' perceived beliefs and attitudes about the fathers' abilities influence the fathers' identity and whether they do or do not act upon their own beliefs about their parental role (Maurer, et al., 2001; McBride et al., 2005). This implies that the fathers' form of involvement in caring tasks and beliefs about his role are influenced by the mothers' beliefs.

Research on *maternal gatekeeping* in South-Africa among families with resident fathers supports presence of gender-identity confirming behaviour by mothers, by excluding fathers from performing caring tasks (Makusha & Richter, 2015). This is in line with the assumptions about gender-roles and the beliefs in caring abilities of fathers mentioned above (see 2.1). Yet there were also cases where these gender-norms are challenged by the mother and where fathers were not excluded or even actively motivated to performing caring tasks (Makusha & Richter, 2015). In her research on *motherhood gatekeeping* in South-Africa, Beernink (2012) specifically found that mothers' perceptions of the fathers' competence strongly influence the fathers' involvement in caring tasks. For example, when mothers believe the father is competent they motivate their children to try and involve the father or encourage the father directly (Beernink, 2012). This is supported by other research that confirmed that when trying to enhance the fathers' participation in caring tasks, active support of the mother or spouse seems to be vital (Manninno & Deutsch, 2007; Maurer, et al., 2001).

2.3   Limitations and criticisms on the theory

Maternal gatekeeping assumes that the mother has a high bargaining power in controlling who performs caring roles and how these are performed. But the inequalities in caring are not solely women´s problem caused by women's behaviours and expectations. While the *gatekeeping* theory's purpose seems to be to bring extra attention to the role women play or have played in the

maintaining an unequal division of caring, or in change by defying traditional norms by increasing father involvement (Makusha & Richter, 2015; McBride et al., 2005), the theory does not do justice to other sources and power players that limit the mothers' ´power´ to moderate and influence inequality.

The unequal division of caring tasks depends on more than just the perceived attitudes of the mothers. To better understand if and how the mothers' attitudes influence the father these other factors must be addressed as well. This issue was also addressed by two Symbolic Interactionists, E.W. Burgess and W. Waller, who according to LaRossa and Reitzes (2009) made two important additions to the application of social interactionism when studying social roles within the family. Firstly that interactions in families are influenced of a larger culture. And secondly that families are dynamic and the importance of conflict, bargaining and the distribution of power between family members (LaRossa & Reitzes, 2009). So the father is not a passive agent, guided solely by the views and expectations of the other family members, but an active participant in the interaction and dynamics (Felson, 1985; Ichiyama, 1993; LaRossa & Reitzes, 2009). Consequently, the performance and views of the father himself on caring and the father-role are not necessarily in line the mothers' attitudes and expectations about the division of caring tasks (Pettifor, et al., 2012). When fathers and mothers have conflicting ideas about the division of caring tasks negotiation, bargaining power and resistance to change become important factors in how caring tasks are divided (Agarwal, 2011; Doorten, 2008; Maninno & Deutsch, 2007; Shefer et al., 2008). However, as mentioned in the introduction and 2.1, with regard to family life and taking care of children, South-African fathers are generally in a dominant position and might resist women's empowerment as well as being reluctant to pick up what they perceive to be emasculating tasks.

The goal of this thesis is to investigate *maternal gatekeeping* in South Africa, in particular whether and how the different forms of this *gatekeeping* are perceived and experienced by residential low-income fathers and whether and how this is evaluated by the fathers. This specific category of *residential* fathers been relatively unexplored in this field, while it shares other important characteristics with the more researched groups (separated couples & unemployed fathers), like income and social groups. The first step is to look at how fathers view their own role as a father, and how they feel this is guided by gender- and social norms and their own attitudes. The second step is to expand on how they perceive and cope with the mothers' attitudes and expectations about the father performing caring tasks. Through this research it should become visible whether they experience any forms of Trinder's (2008) variety of *gate-opening* and *gate-closing* behaviour, how they evaluate these and how this influences their view on caring tasks within

their father-identity and what they believe they should do. Hence, the following question and sub-questions will be addressed in this thesis:

How are resident, low-income South African men's caring roles and father-identity influenced by perceived gatekeeping behaviour of their partners?

> *1. How do resident South-African fathers in low income families view the different roles within their father-identity? And how much importance do they attach to the caring role?*

> *2. Do fathers in low income families evaluate the mothers' gatekeeping behaviour, and if so in what way? And how do these fathers cope with the perceived gatekeeping behaviour?*

3. Methods

The goal of this thesis is to better understand how fathers feel about performing caring tasks and how they perceive attitudes and expectations of the mother on them performing these tasks. For such a research objective an interpretative qualitative approach, with individual interviews, seems to be the most suitable approach (Boeije, 2008; Evers & de Boer, 2011). Data are gathered and analysed based on the theoretical framework and will focus on perceived *maternal gatekeeping* and the fathers' caring roles. The sample of this study consists of resident fathers of low-income families in Greater-Johannesburg. Fifteen participants were recruited for this study, ten from men working low-income jobs on the University of Johannesburg campus (9 security guards, 1 fast-food employee) who were recruited directly. And five from a pool of low-income foster-fathers at the Child-Welfare Services Johannesburg (4 pensioners and 1 employed father)[3], who were selected by Child-Welfare Services. With this relatively unspecific profile this study got a diverse group of participants with fathers aging between 22 and 71 and children aging between 1 month and 27 years[4].

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a topic-list based on the theory discussed (Boeije, 2008), as shown in the appendix. The interviews took between 40 minutes and 1 hour. The interviews were transcribed and analysed through open, axial and selective coding based on the theoretical framework (Boeije, 2008). Through the axial and selective coding, irrelevant data was discarded, trends and similarities were identified and turned into a number of theoretical propositions about how fathers see themselves, how they evaluate mothers' attitudes and expectations and how they perceive the influence of this in their views on what they should do.

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[3] There is reason to suspect that the employed father (interview 9) might not be as low income as the other participants.
[4] All fathers have at least 1 resident (grand-) child who is under 18.

There are, however, some risks concerning the reliability and validity of this study. Firstly, interviews may have rendered socially desirable answers, for example on the performance of more feminine tasks and admitting being influenced by their partner, which men might have been uncomfortable admitting to (Morrell & Richter, 2006; Boeije, 2008). An attempt was made to mitigate this by having the interviews in an environment where the participant feels comfortable enough to speak openly. Secondly, there may be a volunteer-bias. Therefore, this will have to be taken into account when interpreting the results and conclusions. Thirdly, it is important to keep in mind that there are differences between the perceived involvement in caring and real involvement, especially with men and caring there seems to be a significant difference between these (Maurer, et al., 2001; McBride, et al, 2005). However, the real participation in caring is not the focus of the research question, it is the fathers' perceived role and involvement that matter here. Lastly, cultural differences between the researcher and the participants may have affected the data collection and interpretation. Therefore, both in data collection and in data analysis, it was attempted to stay aware to the position of the respondent and personal cultural assumptions during the interview and analysis to whether any of bias shows in the way questions were given and answered (Evers & de Boer, 2011).

4. Results:

This chapter presents the results of the interviews. The results are discussed in three sections. The first is on how the fathers view their father-roles, how they fulfil these and how they value these. The second part is on perceived maternal influence and how fathers cope with this. The last part will be on some perceived outside influences.

4.1 Father-roles and responsibilities

In the theory, father-roles are described as: breadwinning, ethical and moral guidance, supporting the partner and nurturance and care. All of these are seen to some extent among all fathers, though results on which of these they valued more than others are not straightforward. When asked about a fathers' responsibility and good fathering, most fathers describe a father who provides and makes sure that their family has what they need and showing their children love.

> *Being a good father means having a good job, a good father is one who provides for his family… (Interview 14)*

> *Yes, you can still be a good father. In the way you treat your family, the way that you show love (to) them and appreciate your family and so on. You know. Engaging them lively,*

making them happy in many ways, it's not only by providing and buying them things. But if you are gentle and caring for them, I think that's good. (Interview 11)

The second quote shows that, even though providing is considered important, it is not the fathers' sole purpose. Also important is that most respondents show that they strongly care about the how money is spent. All fathers view it as their responsibility to make sure their children are not only provided with basic needs like food and clothing, but *care about* making sure that the children are happy, that they get an education, become self-reliant and would be able to build a better life than themselves.

I wish to take my children to better schools, so that they can have a better future. I think that is everybody's wish. (Interview 14)

Finances are also a huge source of worry among many respondents. Desire for a better paid job, and fear for debt and the inability to provide for certain needs seems to weigh heavily among some.

Most of the parents I think they are doing well, because they make their children go to (private) school. I feel ashamed of myself because I said "No I cannot afford to do this and that for my children", but those people can. (Interview 13)

This is not just about shortcomings as a provider, but also an obstacle for them being more involved fathers. With the exception of two fathers, all respondents mention their difficulties when they were unable to *take care of* (in resources) the children with what they *care about* (what they believe their child needs from them). Fathers seem to especially worry about having enough money for food, clothes and school fees or do occasional recreational activities with the children.

You know, what is most difficult for me. Things that I want to do for my children and my wife, but I can't afford it. Sometimes I find that because I'm working as a security officer, I'm paid less. (Interview 1)

For sometimes when they go out for school trips, you have to help them. And if you can't, you let them down, so I say "oh my son, I do have financial problems, this one trip I can't afford, for this reason. I'll try my best to next time, and make you happy." (Interview 4)

Being a role model seems to be secondary to being provider, but nevertheless important. There definitely is a desire to set a good example for their children, by providing, and teaching them to distinguish good from bad, which seems to be in line with their desires and perceived

responsibility in the child's education and future and development into a 'good person', especially with boys.

> *Whatever has got to do with boys, I'm the one making sure he becomes an adult, with respect, like me, and I don't want him to be like these bully boys. I'm the one who has to tell him what is not all right or keep him from mixing with this bully boys, and drugs and all those types. (Interview 4)*

An example of an area where all fathers see a role for themselves is in setting rules and disciplining the children.

> *You know, if you just let your kids do whatever they like, if you don't put down ground rules or whatever... It's always possible that they start doing the wrong things in society. Your kids must become responsible. (Interview 12)*

> *The best way is to discipline a child is to talk to her, because if you shout at someone, that someone won't listen to you. But if you talk to her, nicely, as a father, she will listen, there is no other way that she will listen. (Interview 14)*

On this topic there seemed to be a general sentiment that, when disciplining, an attempt to understand the child should be made rather than smacking or beating the child, preferring a less dominating or aggressive masculinity. Another area where fathers see themselves involved in, is in the more fun and recreational activities with the children, such as playing with them or taking them to the swimming pool or mall.

> *Yeah, you know when I cook for my kids, and even when I take them out we go to play to the park or go wherever, I become very happy. You know it's a happy thing for me if I take them to a swimming pool, I even taught them how to swim. (Interview 13)*

As for more hands-on, direct *caregiving* responsibilities there are only a few examples in which the father considers himself as having fully shared parental responsibilities, where also more ´feminine´ caring tasks are shared. Furthermore, there are few examples of fathers who see themselves solely as a breadwinner. Some fathers enjoy being more involved in caring and feminine tasks, whereas others show some resistance, either not wanting to or feeling unsuited to perform certain tasks. In total there are only 4 respondents who seem to consciously maintain a strongly gendered division of work in the house.

> *I believe that if I do something, I won't do it good and as a result the child might get affected and all those type of things. I'm not good at that. So I can say, "okay my girl you can go to*

the what-what", but she has to change the nappies before she can go to the shop and all those things. Then I can babysit, I don't have a problem. (Interview 4)

Another explanation given for an unequal division of care among some of the fathers, was that they are perceived as being 'skill-based' rather than based on traditional gender roles.

I'm not a good cook. Fast foods I can make, but we stopped that because she's on a roll of a good diet. But there is a lot I can't do and when it comes to cooking, my wife is superb in cooking and when I cook, and half the time I won't even eat it. I tend to leave her at that, because she's very good at that. (Interview 9)

Fathers describe their part in the household work as the heavier 'handyman' and maintenance tasks, thus making in their view a fair division of responsibilities, and giving themselves a more supportive role in responsibilities their partner is 'better at'. Even though they describe it as individual skills of themselves and their partner, it usually created a division of unpaid labour that is very similar to one based on gender.

The majority of the fathers however says they have no problem with performing any of the caring tasks. Ranging from some knowingly and actively going actively against tradition norms (and acting in their view, as a fully equally participating carer) to others who say they do not mind if it was ever necessary that they would for example, change a nappy or do the washing.

Well, while she did more, I also changed the nappies. So that was more her, but whenever she wasn't able to do it, or doing something else, I could also do that. There was no problem with that. (Interview 12)

Yeah the most time the mother of the child must take the responsibility to change the nappy, but even me, I changed the nappies when my child was young. If the mother of my child goes to town, she let me stay with the child, so I must take the responsibility. Even now, still I take the responsibility. (Interview 15)

Especially the elder men/pensioners seem to embrace their caring role, and appreciate being seen performing this role.

*Well you know, because people they come in your place sometimes uninvited and they find you hold a mop you are cleaning, now what will you do? Throw that mop away and run away? *scoffs* So for me it's normal, whether you see me or who's next to me, it doesn't bother me. As well I see sometimes, as I told you about my age, we have overcome such things. [...] We now understand the needs of life. Not where the wife must be something that*

must be pushed around. Well when are still young we had that, but we've grown up and can see that this is not fair. (Interview 11)

Still, with the exception of the father in interview 13, the more nurturing caring role of the father is secondary to the mothers' caring role. Fathers are only really active when mothers are unavailable, during weekends or just occasionally to support their partner.

4.2 Perceived influence partner

4.2.1 Stimulating involvement

At least half the respondents experience some form of encouragement or *gate-opening* from their partner to become more involved with family life or caring for child. When asked about whether their partner ever asked them to do something or expected them to participate in taking care of the children, there are two kinds of requests that the mothers seem to make. The first kind are requests to help them or occasionally take over a certain caring task.

You know, we talk about it sometimes. Because if she wants to attend this something like a church service, or go out for something else. She asks "please do this for the child, give breakfast or anything" (interview 14)

This often seems to be in line with their own perception of themselves as being a secondary carer, willing to do most kinds of caring tasks, but not performing them on a daily or structural basis. While there are cases where fathers right out refuse to do certain things, most fathers do not seem to have any issues with performing traditionally more feminine tasks for their children.

Well, definitely, the laundry part, that one, I don't just entertain. That's strictly, with customs and everything… that belongs to the mother. (Interview 2)

Ah yeah, whenever she is tired, I do the things, not always, but I don't have a problem, I do it with love. (Interview 8)

I'm the only person that takes the children out and parks and whatsoever, but she doesn't have that much time for kids. She will tell you always that she's tired because she's working Monday to Saturday, so when I come home I have just to cook and you know. (Interview 13)

This shows some of the diversity of the fathers' (self-perceived) involvement of in care. The fathers who appear to do equal, or more caring, are fathers who are either pensioners or have a working partner who earns a similar or higher wage. The majority of fathers seems to react

positively towards occasional requests to help out from their partner, showing at least willingness to participate as a secondary carer.

The second kind of request identified various times throughout the data is about emotional involvement and time the father spends with the children.

She expects me to take them out. To go to the grounds sometimes, but the problem is I´ve got no time. Maybe I take the kids to the malls, but I´ve got no time to do that. Sometimes I used to do that, but (only) if I´m balanced with the money, because everything is money. (Interview 5)

Fathers themselves also seem to find this important, if not the most enjoyable part of being a father, yet for them fulfilling the providing role seems to stand in the way of fulfilling this role to the satisfaction of both the mother and themselves. Long hours, especially among the security guards who work 8-12 hour shifts for 4-6 days a week, make the fathers feel torn between their responsibility to provide and their ability to spend more time with their children.

But if I was working normal hours, get home early, I'd be happy to do some of the stuff. Because I see that she is working very, very hard, she is pushing herself to get things done. And it's not good. She knows I'm not around and that when I get home I'm very, very tired. (Interview 14)

These results show that fathers feel unable to live up to the provider role that they see for themselves, and also show that many feel their hours and wage form an obstacle to become more involved with their children.

4.2.2 Limiting and controlling involvement

Previous research on South-African fathers shows that *gate-closing* behaviour takes place mostly among couples with parents are not living together and where the mother believe the fathers' presence might have a harmful effect on the children. Controlling and limiting involvement are discussed together because most cases found of active *gate-closing* in the data overlapped with *contingent* gatekeeping. Primarily, because it only seems to occur for specific tasks, and often with the fathers consent, with little or no signs of conflict between the parents.

There is one form of *gate closing* that came up repeatedly throughout the interviews. This concerned tasks that fathers were excluded from, or where they feel their involvement was unwanted and that the mother views the tasks as 'her responsibilities'. Though often enough the

fathers seem equally uncomfortable performing some of these tasks, especially when dealing with girls.

> *She does most of the things, there is one thing that she asks me not to do, I can't change nappies. She doesn't want me to do things sometimes because it's a girl. I'm scared, I don't want to, because the child is a girl, it might be better if the child was a boy. (Interview 7)*

The same seems to go for things like 'explaining womanhood' when girls hit puberty. Both fathers and mothers seem to think that is something for the mother to deal with.

There are two different reactions to perceived *gate-closing* behaviour. The first reaction, chosen by a vast majority of fathers, is to step back from these responsibilities and leave them to the mother.

> *Maybe she's feeding the child, and you also want to help with something like food, you want also to give something the child. They do not feel comfortable about that. It's like you intrude. So you must give them that time. Yes. (Interview 4)*

There are however some cases where the father resists the *gate-closing* and attempts to increase his involvement in caring.

> *Yah, for example. I wanted to do this nappies thing, but she didn't want to show me how, until I read the manual and try this myself. But still if I do it, she will complain; 'you have to tie this and tie this'. They still think you are doing their job, even if I want to do that. (Interview 14)*

4.2.3 Content with involvement

This is the most difficult form of *gatekeeping* to identify, because it concerns the observation of an absence of behaviour. The easiest way to try and assess this is to just describe the fathers who think their partner is content with their involvement, independent of how intensive the father's involvement actually is. From the following examples one father acts as the main care-giver, one as almost equal care-giver and one acting primarily as a provider.

> *She doesn't tell me to do that and don't do that, I do it by myself. If I see that the kids have too much laundry or whatsoever, I just do it. (Interview 13)*

> *She doesn't complain, usually we are together in helping the kids, we share the responsibilities. She doesn't care if I'm doing more of the women's stuff. (Interview 8)*

I think so, I think she was quite happy. And look, I was happy with the responsibility she had and what she did, I don't think she would have had to do more. (Interview 12)

Even though these men show different levels of (self-perceived) involvement in caregiving as fathers, they all perceive similar evaluations by their partner. Assuming that the absence of complaints or encouragement meant their partner is satisfied with their involvement, these fathers feel no need to change their involvement.

4.2.4 Other ways of maternal influences & outside influence

In addition to the different forms of *gatekeeping* found, there are also some other cases that definitely show that some mothers attempt to (positively) influence the father's behaviour and fulfilment of his father-roles. A few fathers mention how their partner has changed their behaviour after they had their child.

(When drinking alcohol)You have no control, you start behaving badly. You know my wife is in the end like "it's better for me to divorce you, because this life is very hard." And soon as this thing happened, I decided to stop on alcohol, and stop doing the bad things. (Interview 1)

In this case the mother threatened divorce if the father would not stop drinking. These cases were mostly about stopping the father's bad behaviour and to start act like a responsible father and partner. Most other fathers however seem to get no complaints, or are less willing to admit that their partner might, at some point, have been unsatisfied or unhappy with their behaviour.

Another relevant issue that comes forward from the interviews was that mothers do not only influence the fathers' father-role by influencing their involvement in care, but also by confirming the fathers' role as a provider.

She is expecting to make sure that I'm a hard worker, because as a man, I have to make sure I'm providing. (Interview 3)

So while there are no mothers who completely close off the caring-role as their terrain, mothers with more traditional views definitely seem to make fathers feel as if mothers expect them to first be a provider and only then a care-giver.

Theory also indicated that you cannot consider the interactions within a family without recognising that it takes place in a broader society. The data here also shows signs of the influence from community and culture. Especially when it concerns the fathers' image. Many fathers show that they want to be seen as 'good fathers' within the community.

A parent is someone who's always making sure that the neighbours respect him, they know him as a responsible person, not as someone who hasn't got value in his family. The neighbours should be proud of myself, Oh I like to be a neighbour of such a person. (Interview 4)

Some are also concerned with tasks they do not want to be seen doing as it makes them feel uncomfortable.

Yes, that's what I'm trying to say. If there are friends or family I don't touch anything, then she is responsible. Because others are talking too much "why are you cooking? Why is this woman doing nothing?" I don't touch anything. (Interview 5)

However, others are more willing to openly embrace their participatory role and to take pride in it.

She's happy for what I'm doing but is scared when the family is there, or when friends are there, scared of what the people are gonna say. My wife says; "They see me helping you with the dishes." She used to say, "Sometimes you have to just sit down." And I told her straight; "No this thing is not a secret, and the people they must know it. We must do these things all the time. In the house here we help one another. So don't worry, even if they talk, I'll say 'look guys, I'm helping my wife for my happiness.'" Which forces me to do that thing, I'm helping because I want to help her. (Interview 1)

These examples show there seems to be pressure from the outside to conform to more traditional, gendered division of care-giving, and men having varying abilities to withstand that pressure.

5. Conclusion & Discussion

5.1 Conclusions

This thesis addresses how fathers in low-income South-African families view their father- and caring-roles and how they are influenced by their partner. This chapter presents conclusions that can be drawn from field research results, within the framework of the theory.

The results on how the participants perceive their father-role show that the majority of the fathers look at themselves primarily as a provider. Falling short in providing is not only a source of shame but also seen as an obstacle for providing care. Fathers feel unable to *take care of,* as provider, the child's needs that they *care about.* For example they lack the means to provide the

education and occasional recreational activities they believe to be important for the child. Yet they do feel that despite only providing a low-, sometimes insufficient income they also have other roles to play in the family as an involved *caregiver*. Especially this relates to showing the child affection and acting as a role model. While most do not have problems with traditional feminine tasks, they mostly perform more nurturing tasks as a supporting, secondary caregiver.

As to the influence of mothers to increase or hold off the fathers' involvement in care, this research mapped the perceived maternal influence on the father with Trinder's (2008) forms of maternal gatekeeping. Perceived examples of all forms of gate-keeping were found. The forms of gatekeeping behaviour can be divided into two categories. The *gate-opening* and a combination of *gate-closing* and *contingent gate-opening*.

Gate-opening is mostly seen in occasional requests to take over tasks usually performed by the mother and a general desire of the mothers for fathers to be more involved with the children. Most fathers do not have a problem with supporting their partner with occasional more 'feminine' tasks. Important obstacles that fathers perceive themselves are long working hours and failure to collect sufficient (financial) resources for caregiving. This gendered division of care is also confirmed with the cases of perceived *gate-closing/ contingent gate-opening* that were found. When *gate-closing* takes place, it seems more occasional and for specific tasks than a structural desire of the mother for the father to become less involved, or believing the father has a bad influence on the child. Most of the perceived gate-closing is perceived to be about mothers protecting 'their responsibility' and questioning the ability of men to perform caregiving tasks. The majority of respondents do not see a problem with ´stepping back´ from these tasks and seem content with the arrangement and (gendered) division of care.

Another issue which both confirmed and challenged the literature is the pressure to conform to social norms. This is best observed in cases where fathers' own views on whether fathers should perform more caring tasks. Where some feel uncomfortable being seen by others while performing more 'feminine' tasks, others openly challenge the traditional norms of dividing care in a traditional manner.

Based on this research it can be concluded that mothers *definitely* have influence on the fathers' caring-role and father-identity. However, less can be generalized about the strength of the impact or the direction of this influence. Much of the conclusions are in line with the larger lines set in the theory and provides empirical support and better understanding of how these theories work in the South-African context. Examples are found of mothers confirming a traditional division of care

and providing, but also of mothers challenging this division. In addition, examples are found of both fathers accepting and resisting exclusion and fathers accepting and resisting encouraged involvement. And while it confirms that families with residential fathers maintain a somewhat gendered division of care, none of the fathers in this pool are completely uninvolved or unwilling to participate in more ´feminine´ tasks.

5.2   Discussion & limitations

The most important factor to take into account when comparing these results with the results of previous empirical research on fatherhood in South Africa and *maternal gatekeeping* is that the fathers in this thesis are residential and that most are employed in low-income jobs, whereas previous research has focussed on non-residential and unemployed fathers.

In contrast to what was expected based on the theory, the results showed hardly any influence of parental conflict. Possibly conflict is not as prominent in couples that are still together, compared to the separated couples are usually discussed in research about gatekeeping. But it could also be due to fathers' inability to recognise conflict or unwillingness to talk about it. Furthermore, the forms of perceived gate-keeping found seemed 'lighter' and more often accepted by both parties than those found in previous research. This could well be due to the fathers´ residential status and many of them fulfilling a providing role.

There are some limitations to the validity and reliability of this study. Firstly considering the results on *passive gate-opening*. Applying the concept of perceived *passive gate-opening,* results based on perceived absence of behaviour are not as solid as might be desirable. Secondly, this research would have given a more complete picture if the partners of the respondents had been interviewed as well, giving a better insight into the differences between perceived behaviours and expectations of the mother and reality. Thirdly, there was a language barrier as most of the respondents did not speak English as their first language. This may have limited their ability to express themselves, or (when using an interpreter) the interpreter´s involvement may have influenced their answers. Fourthly, some interviews with security guards were conducted in their workplaces, in a restless, possibly uncomfortable environment for both interviewer and participant. Fifthly and lastly, the relatively unspecific profile used for recruiting participants gave a very diverse group with different ethnic groups and different ages of the fathers and children, making it harder to identify patterns or generalize.

5.3   Recommendations

None of the results and conclusions seem clear enough to already use them as basis for any interventions or policy. They do however confirm that any attempts to increase fathers' involvement

should not only be focused on the benefits of being involved as the father but also on an array of possible obstacles and opportunities.

A relatively surprising result was that some fathers resisted exclusion and seem to embrace an alternative masculinity. At least some fathers seem to want to be able to be more involved and take care of their children, and this seems to out-value social pressures and traditional practices. Future research is recommended to determine how wide-spread this phenomenon is, how it relates to the providing role and how fathers themselves might play a role in changing the norm. Therefore, it is important to do expand research within the groups of residential, low-income fathers or to use these results to compare residential fathers with either unemployed residential fathers or other groups with an otherwise different profile. It would also be worthwhile to do further research on how low-income fathers feel the pressure of work and/or helped by grants and social assistance in their ability to take better care of children and enabled to become more involved caregiving. This would furthermore fit into debates about minimum living wages and reasonable working hours.

6. Literature

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Appendix I: Topic/ Question list

Introductory questions (Est. time 5 min):

I will start with some questions for the recording and that would help me give a better understanding about what your life looks like.

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- Who do else lives in the same house as you?
    - *nr. of children;*
    - *relationship status with mother & children (father or substitute father)*
- How long have you lived with your partner (and children)?
- Are they boys or girls? And how old are they?
- Are they your only children?
    - Where do they live?
    - How often do you see them?
- Do you currently have a job?
    - If yes: What do you do for a living?
        - How many days/hours do you work?
    - Is there anyone else with a job in your house?

1. Masculinity: norms and roles (Est. time 5-10 min)

1. What is, in your opinion, ideal father? (characteristics and their role models)

2. What is your opinion of other fathers that you know in your family and in this community? What do they do well? And what do they do badly? (Differences & change: Modern & traditional practices, and how do you view these?)

3. Do you recognise any of this in yourself? (Elaborate)

4. How do you think others think of you (as a father)? (probe to friends, neighbours, extended family)

5. Where do your views on fatherhood come from? (own father, culture etc.)

2. Involvement in/importance of the caring role

2.1   Caring about/ Taking care of(Est. time 10-15 min)

1. What do you think your child(ren) need from their parents? (differences for ages, genders, own children etc.)

2. And what do you see as your responsibilities in taking care of things like this?

3. Do you sometimes worry if you can provide your children with what you wish for them?

4. Do you care about your children, and how do you express this? Does your wife express this in a different way?

5. How do you feel about the different responsebilities, the the more masculine providing financially and protecting and the maybe more direct caregiving roles? (Cooking, emotional support, watching the kids etc.) And which do you think is more important? Does *mothers name* express this in a different way?

6. And what does or should *name mother* do according to you? What do you think her responsibilities and required skills are?

7. Who else is involved in taking care of your child(ren)?

8. Are the responsibilities between (others involved), *mother´s name* and you responsibilities different? And what responsibilities do you think can and can´t be shared? And in what situations?

9. How did (the others involved**,)** *mothers name*, and you decide to divide care like this? (Probe towards negotiation or the lack thereof) (Probe for communication, power relations, who organizes?etc.)

2.2.   Caregiving: (Est. time 10 min)

1. What kind of things do you usually do when you are with your child(ren)? (Cooking, supervise, playing etc.) How do you spend your time with your children?

2. What kind of caring tasks do you think you do especially well? And why? (Probe towards what kind of tasks they find rewarding or which are more dutiful)

3. And what do you find most difficult? And why? (How often do you do this and how much time do you spend on it?) (Probe towards whether they find rewarding or important that they do it anyways)

4 Would this change in the company of others? (Friends/family present or in public spaces)

3.   Perceived gatekeeping

3.1   Interaction: (shown) expectations and appreciation (Est. time 5-10 min)

1. What does name mother expect you to do for your children and around the house?

2. Do you think name mother ever thinks you do a bad job as a dad? In what kind of situations? Does this happen often? (Examples, reasons and own defence against it)

3. What do you think *name mother* thinks you do particularly well as a father?

3.2   Attitudes, role acceptance and general happiness about arrangement (Est. time 5-10 min)

1. How do you feel about the time you spend with your child and what you do with them? Would you like it to be more or less and in what way?

2. And how do you think name mother feels about your contact with the child(ren)? Would she like it to be more or less and in what way? (Probe towards mother's attitudes and convictions about fatherhood)

3.3   Perceived competence/ trust (Est. time 5-10 min)

1. Does name mother sometimes encourage you to get more involved with your child(ren)? / When does she want you to be (more) involved and in what way? (Probe about support, responsibilities, authority and examples)

2 Does *name mother* sometimes prevent your involvement with the child(ren)? /when doesn't she want you to be involved, or less involved, and why? (Probe about support, responsibilities, authority and examples)

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the subjects we've talked about? Or something about fatherhood we've missed?