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The fathers of Destiny: Representations of fatherhood in a popular South African magazine

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This study utilised textual analysis to characterise the representation of fatherhood in the eight issues of *Destiny Man* magazine published in 2014. Stories that pertained to fatherhood and that were related to aspects of contemporary family construction, work, and identity formation were included for detailed text analysis. Our findings suggest that fatherhood is defined by access to wealth, and is inextricably linked to features of modern-day neoliberal capitalism with its bias towards wealth accumulation and economic standards of identity. Additionally, matters such as race and origin seem to be the primary classification criteria when it comes to self-identification as a father figure. From these data, we conclude that the notion of fatherhood is fluid; it changes continuously depending on the social class position of the incumbent male.

Keywords: apartheid, black middle-class masculinity, fatherhood, psychoanalysis

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Introduction

Destiny Man magazine was first published in 2009, and is primarily targeted at middle-class black South African men. It depicts stories of African masculinities in the context of the political and economic ideologies of contemporary South Africa. This brief study sought to explore the ways in which this popular magazine characterises expressions of masculinity in relation to fatherhood.

Popular magazines are significant forums for social movements that define contemporary times (McCombs, 2014). They also allow for social commentary and are unconstrained of the specific content or sources. For these reasons they are a sought-after information source by the general public, and also special interest readerships with a particular affinity to the coverage of the popular magazine.

The historical political disenfranchisement of black South African males, and the associated economic disempowerment, may influence them towards masculinist ideologies that embrace aggressive self-posturing, especially in social circles, including in fatherhood roles (Langa, 2010; Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012; Walker, 2005). For instance, it is well documented that in hegemonic displays of masculinity, some men displace their frustrations with economic challenges onto their female partners (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jewkes, 2002; Sitters, 2002; Yeoh & Willis, 1999).[1] These men may be responding to the perceived threat of being seen as '*unmanly*'. It is unclear whether the same dynamic would be true of same sex marriage partners.

Representations of fatherhood in the media influence the private sphere of familial relations (Prinsloo, 2002). Popular magazines are an outlet for emerging new masculinities in contemporary societies; including practices of fatherhood (Alexander, 2003; Benwell, 2003; Crawshaw, 2007; Stibbe, 2004). According to Richter and Morrell (2006), fatherhood expressions in South Africa are inextricably linked to conceptions of masculinity in the country's socio-economic history. For example, historically, the ability of migrant workers to provide for their families in the reserves encapsulated what it meant to be both a good man and a good father (Moodie, 2001). Even in contexts where the ability to provide economically is thwarted, being a good man still encompasses being a good father (Silberschmidt, 2001).

Lesejane (2006) argued that the notion of fatherhood has undergone fundamental changes over the years. Thus, although the representation of fatherhood is invariably masculine, the forms this masculinity takes may vary. Van der Meer (2016) and Hoornstra (2016) described men who choose to be involved fully in the care of their children, despite economic challenges. It has also been shown (Connell, 2012) that an increasing number of men are choosing to '*do*' masculinity and fatherhood more progressively, in ways that differ from the patriarchal archetypes that sustain gender inequality. Studies show that even amongst teenagers, notions of fatherhood as a social responsibility are common, and younger men actively plan for fatherhood, cognisant of its implications (Hendricks, Swartz, & Bhana, 2010; Smith & Langa, 2010).

The 'Working Dad' section in *Destiny Man* magazine is an included feature in every issue. Written by Kojo Baffoe, the magazine's editor, this feature gives a subjective stance on the experience of fathering in present-day South African society. 'Working Dad' is directed at the African middle-class male and the typical story is about fatherhood in the world of white-collar fathers. The 'Working Dad' section features stories about the tensions that many black middle-class fathers experience in their participation of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberal capitalism is an ideology that promotes consumer culture (LaMothe, 2016). It implicitly seeks to project idealised fatherhood imagery defined by access to certain economic privileges. 'Working Dad' stories are intended to be about how to be a good-enough father in South Africa today as represented in the media.
This study sought to address the following questions:

1. What fatherhood messages are conveyed in the *Destiny Man* magazine special section regarding concepts of masculinity and wealth?
2. How are the fatherhood messages conveyed (i.e. through imagery and/or text)?

3. What images appear to define fatherhood, and which images seem to be excluded, and why?

Method

Sources of data

The 2014 Issues of *Destiny Man* magazine (n = 8) were the primary sources of data. Articles and visuals from the 'Working Dad' section of the magazine that met the following criteria were included in the analysis:

1. Illustrations of men with children;
2. Articles about fatherhood in contemporary South Africa; and
3. Articles relating to contemporary definitions of masculinity, including elements of wealth and access to resources.

Number of articles and images

In total, we identified 35 articles with fatherhood themes using the search terms dad/father, work, child/children/kids, responsibility, family, and generational wealth. All the articles directly, or indirectly, looked at the subject of fatherhood. The main coding themes that were used as guidelines in selection criteria were:

1. Racial topics
2. Political content
3. Gender and sexuality issues, and
4. Economics of African masculinities.

Fifty-four images were included for the analysis if they featured images of fathers with children engaged in a display of parenting such as appearing alongside children, holding, or playing with them. The latent meaning(s) behind these images were explored and their implications discussed. Applying the criteria as above, we selected six articles and five images embedded within the articles for analysis (see Table 1).

Data analysis

We coded the stories alphanumerically (such as Theme 1= Holding Fatherhood, located in e.g. January/February edition) and associated images with superscripts so that Image #1 from Story #1 is systematically coded. A text analysis (Alexander, 2003; Wilbraham & Delvin, 1996) was utilised for the data analysis. The step-by-step process included:

1. Identifying themes, characters, and attributes;
2. Constructing meaning;
3. Deconstructing and interpreting the meanings through a specified framework.

This method operates within the hermeneutic/ethnographic approach to content analysis (Parker, 1995). It requires researchers to adopt a fairly flexible methodology, allowing for the discerning of semantic units of analysis (e.g. word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph) based on decisions about themes of 'meaning'. In applying textual analysis, text data were organised into various themes and analysed in terms of their textual meanings and discourses. We imputed theories of masculinity and race, as well as their intersections, for a rich interpretation of findings.

Findings and discussion

The themes that resulted from the analysis of material in the 'Working Dad' feature included:

1. Intersections of class by race
2. Negligent fatherhood
3. Solitary fatherhood
4. Engaged fathering
5. Fatherhood as family business

We discuss each of this with reference to illustrative content and literature control.

Theme 1: Working dad and holding father: Intersections of class by race

Six of the 35 stories depicted being a 'working dad' to denote an existence rooted in a neoliberal capitalist framework in which fatherhood expressions are nested in interpersonal relationships in the context of work/family balance.

In the 2014 May–June issue (Story #1), Baffoe presents an anecdote of the challenges black South African fathers may encounter when addressing notions of class and race "middle-class is where children experience the most integration in their neighbourhoods, schools, churches, shops, et cetera.", as opposed to children from lower-income homes who "grow up in remote rural communities" and "are far less likely to interact with people of different racial groups" (p. 90). It appears that a challenge facing black middle-class fathers in suburbia is their children living in a neoliberal ideological bubble in which historical an implicit racism is overlooked.

From Stories #1 and #6 (see Table 1), it would seem that some fathers define their "good fatherhood" role in terms of their ability to afford exorbitant school fees charged by private schools; to "buy" future social capital for their offspring. However, these social capital buy-in escapades may cost the children historical heritage as the children nose-down their indigenous languages for the English language.

From Story #1, it would seem that the anxieties of black middle-class and working-class fathers are not

Table 1. Stories by selection criteria themes

Fatherhood story		Selection theme criteria			
Story and title	Volume/Issue and pages	Race	Politics	Gender and sexuality	Economics
#1 Keeping the Faith	January/February 2014, pp.90	X	X		
#2 In the Name of the Father	October 2014, pp. 97	X	X	X	X
#3 Benni McCarthy Unplugged	March 2014, pp.101.	X	X	X	X
#4 Working Dad Introduction	August 2014, pp.62	X	X		
#5 Family Business	January-February 2014, pp.133	X	X		X
#6 World's Worst Baby-sitter	September 2014			X	X

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the same. While the former's anxieties are related to the main themes addressed in this article – wealth, identity formation, and economic measures of success – the latter's anxieties are focused more on issues of basic provision (see also Ratele, 2013). However, the common denominator is the context of contemporary South Africa, which sees these expressions of African masculinity as diametrically opposed, or perhaps as the *same* form being expressed differently.

Theme 2: Negligent fatherhood

An article within the *Destiny Man* pages covering the issue of apartheid is the perspective written by Tshemese titled "*In the Name of the Father"* (October 2014). The article explores the psychological effects of apartheid on the family and, in particular, on relationships between men and their fathers. Included in the article is a photograph of a father holding an infant (the only one of the six included in this analysis). In the October 2014 issue of *Destiny Man* (Story #2), some black middle-class men were interviewed about their own experiences of being fathered. A few appeared to be resentful of how they were fathered. One recalled his experience of his relationship with his father as follows:

> *You know what? Le outie [a father] dropped the ball big time. Sure, he was there physically, but he was never there. Maybe it would have been better if he hadn't been there at all. Sure there was apartheid and it must have been tough for him, but he never struggled financially. He had opportunities, yet continued making bad decisions, especially financial ones, without thinking about anyone else. Look, I tolerate him because he is my mother's partner…I know this sounds harsh but this is my position* (p. 97).

A switch to the 'holding' father may perhaps be found in Tshemese's (2014) article. It is stated that during the apartheid era, many black African families were broken up by the migrant-labour system, causing fathers and husbands to leave rural areas to seek employment in the industrialised cities and mines:

> *Even the families who remained together were almost always under strain. Much of what is documented about life during apartheid is about the political struggle, with little consideration for how this impacted on people's psyches and relationships within families* (Tshemese, as cited in *Destiny Man* 2014 [October]: 96).

Black fathers are stereotyped as unaccustomed to experiencing profound emotional depths with their children (Langa, 2010; Nduna, Kasese-Hara Ndebele, Pillay, & Manala, 2011). For instance, according to Ratele and colleagues (2012), South African fathers are increasingly accepting their caregiving role in their children's lives as a display of 'positive masculinity'.

Theme 3: Solitary fatherhood

Perhaps the most striking feature of the 'Working Dad' columns is the representation of fatherhood as a seemingly solitary social responsibility pursuit (Stories #1 to 4). For instance, in all the stories analysed for this study, the word 'mother' was not used once. Even more telling is the exclusion of any maternal figure in the developmental cycle of child-rearing. In an interview with Professor Adam Habib, vice chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand (January–February issue); and Story #3 interview with Benni McCarthy, a well-known South African soccer player (March–April issue), there is no reference to a mother figure.[2] In both articles the interviewees are asked about their respective relationships with their children. McCarthy is asked what his greatest achievements have been thus far, to which he responds: "*Becoming a father, because it changed everything – the way I looked at things and the individual I was. It made me grow up very fast*" (p. 101). McCarthy is shown holding his child alone at a foosball table, linking the themes of being a sporting hero and a 'family man'. This is in direct contrast to the portrayals of African masculinities in *Drum* magazine in the early 1950s (Clowes, 2006), which invariably showed fathers holding their children with the mothers present. The difference between the display of fatherhood in *Destiny Man* and African masculinities displayed in *Drum* (Clowes, 2006) is the exclusivity of the father–child dyad in the former, as opposed to the integrated structures seen previously.

Theme 4: Engaged fathering

This theme depicts fathers/paternal figures that go beyond the conception of fathers as protectors, to include those who are present *throughout the child's life*. For instance, a biographical piece written by Baffoe (Story #4) about precocious child musician Daniel Petersen III, mentions the role of fathers in raising gifted children. Daniel's father is quoted as saying, "*I decided not to teach Daniel. I bought him a baby drum kit and he played when he felt like it, but I didn't want it to be because of me*" (July–August 2014, p. 62). Furthermore, he is working on "*instilling a value system that should carry my [his] son through the tough times. I'm raising someone's husband and father. If I don't do that well, I'm failing*" (p. 62).

All the *Destiny Man's* fatherhood stories sampled tended to depict contemporary parenthood as being solely within the domain of masculine control. The father is seen as integral to child development (Stories #1 to 4) and to helping children negotiate the exigencies of post-apartheid South Africa (Stories #1 and #2). Yet, this is accomplished by excluding the contribution of engaged mothers. While this exclusion could be interpreted as an attempt at more active parenthood on the part of fathers, the exclusion serves only to diminish equal gender relations and integrative child-rearing.

Theme 5: Fatherhood as family business

For *Destiny Man*, fatherhood appears to include the commodification of the interpersonal, with social relations carrying monetised value (Story # 5; see also Diamond, 1998). The effect of these fatherhood stories is to depict social relationships in which people engage as commodities. The family as depicted by *Destiny Man* in Story #5, is fundamentally tied to a fetishised commodity-object, rather than being a social relationship

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based on nurturance. Through this process, families (men) become related to each other by social process in terms of production and become alienated as their own relations assume a material shape independent of their control and individual choice and action (Diamond, 1998). This can be seen as a process of individuation; however it also establishes familial relations tied to economic factor. The family, according to *Destiny Man*, is constituted of atomistic elements, where value is accrued through the actions of individuals:

> *He [a caricature of a contemporary man] believes the common factor among successful families is one individual who's usually the primary creator of wealth. This is a person who's typically highly driven, fuelled by a clearly defined vision and sense of purpose* (January/February 2014, p.133).

The family operates much like a business:

> *Unhealthy relationships can be destructive for any family, but for a wealthy one with the objective of preserving wealth from one generation to another they can be catastrophic. Generational wealth has a strong link to the overall structure of the family and this has to be nurtured. To achieve this, families must maintain trust among themselves, communicate regularly and have a speedy and productive way of handling conflicts* (January/February 2014, p. 133).

These excerpts reveal the commodity obsession linked with the perception of the nuclear family as constructed by *Destiny Man*, as well as its link to overall masculinity. Nazley Omar, a *Destiny Man* author, provides a short biography of the rise of the Nathoo brothers, who are successful McDonald's franchisees. They are quoted in the article as saying:

> *Our father always put his team before himself. Every decision he took considered the benefits it would potentially realise not only for himself, but for those who were on his journey with him. He left a void in many lives when he died and big shoes for us to fill* (January/February 2014, p. 134, Story #5).

The article describes the brother's upbringing as done by their father. It fails to mention any females in the family structure, or even later on in adult life. This is almost directly comparable to the observations made by Clowes (2006) in her analysis of *Drum* magazine as the change in depictions of masculinity began from the 1960s. The trend of hegemonic masculinity has been commonplace in media depictions since.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

This research only looked at the 2014 issues of *Destiny Man*. A cursory check of stories from 2009 (the launch of the magazine) appears to bear the same, or similar, fatherhood trends and themes; although a close study of the stories is needed to check on our preliminary impression.

A further limitation relates to the scope of interpretation. While *Destiny Man* is targeted at black middle-class South African men; this also says the stories included are limited in their social coverage. What is important to note is that the evidence presented in the stories we analysed is illustrative of an emergent black fathers' trend generated by the magazine. Future research should include interviews with editors and journalists on fathering to gauge the intention behind producing certain types of content.

Conclusion

We utilised a textual analysis to characterise the representation of fatherhood, masculinity and wealth in the 2014 issues of *Destiny Man* magazine. Emergent themes from the data analysis portray fathering by black males to be defined by expressions of masculinity in the context of a neoliberal capitalist ideology. The emphasis on wealth as a marker of identity formation in the black middle-class results in the structuring of families in line with this neoliberal ideal. Fathering among black middle-class males as depicted in the popular magazine stories we studied seems to be based on the notion of the father as exclusive provider and nurturer of the child, while the role of a maternal figure is omitted.

Endnotes

1. The main reason why females are being chosen as the domestic displays the hegemonic male experience before the 'threat' of feminisation. This is reacted to by omitting females from the contemporary domestic makeup.
2. Due to the limitations of the research, a fuller exploratory account could not be provided regarding all content related to fathers in *Destiny Man*.

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