

A stylized, light-colored illustration of a plant with a central stem, several large leaves, and a cluster of small, round buds or flowers at the top, positioned on the left side of the slide.

# HETEROSEXUAL MEN AND PARENTHOOD DECISION-MAKING IN SOUTH AFRICA: ATTENDING TO THE INVISIBLE NORM

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# A heteronormative blind-spot

- the invisible norm = fertile, white heterosexual men
- normalcy & naturalness of childbearing in the heterosexual life course
- Research concentrates on those who do not fit into the normative category of married heterosexuality
- We do not know about
  - the decision-making processes of heterosexuals
  - what role each partner plays in this process
  - the part played by fertile, heterosexual men.



# A myopic focus on **problem** men

- men considered of necessity, because of negative effects on women's sexual & reproductive choices
- narrow view persists, despite attempts to recognise men's constructive engagement
- research concentrates on (so-called) risky, problematic or disadvantaged, 'Black' men
- 'White' economically-advantaged men = invisible norm
- inadvertently reiterates Whiteness as invisible norm

# A narrative-discursive analysis of male involvement in parenthood decision-making among 'white' heterosexuals

Cohort	Reproductive status	Gender	Ave age (years)	No. of participants
1. > 40 yrs. 'past childbearing'	Parents	Men	46.5	6
		Women	49.1	6
2. 21 – 30 yrs.	Childfree	Men	24	7
		Women	24.4	5
Total (n =)				24

# Data analysis: The Narrative-discursive method

- synthesis of discourse analysis + narrative theory, influenced by discursive psychology
- How speakers:
  - draw on **discourses/discursive resources** & the **positioning** within these
  - mobilise discursive resources
- **Positioning analysis** → Interactive negotiation of meaning & power
- **Rhetorical work:**
  - discursive tactics → “interactive moves” to deal with interactive ‘trouble’
  - rhetorical or positioning strategies
- **‘Trouble’** → Negative/undesirable positions

# Findings: a troublesome topic

- 3 main sources of trouble:



(1)

'An unusual  
conversational  
move'



(2)

Changing  
gender norms –  
The 'new'  
father

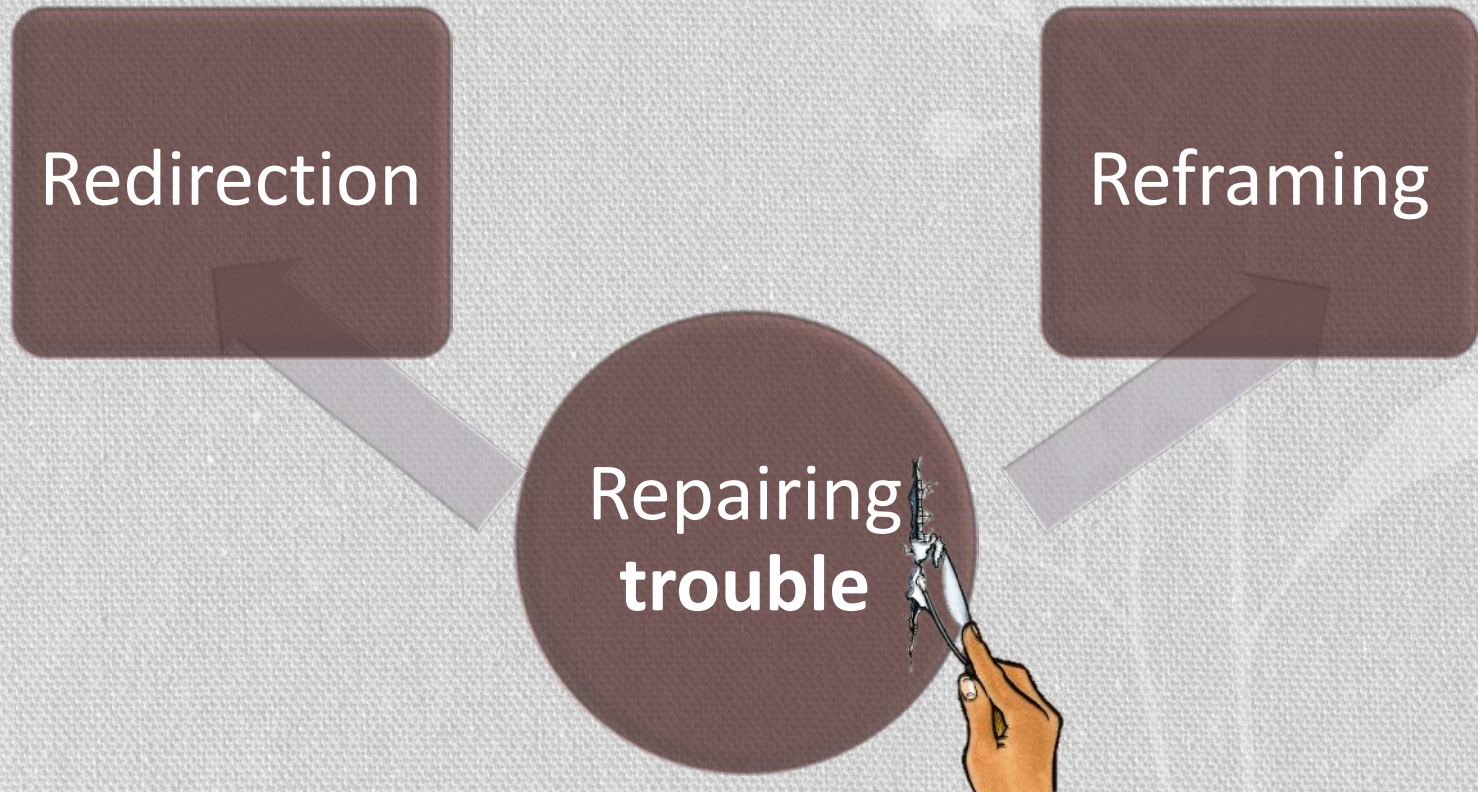


(3)

Parenthood =  
choice vs.  
chance

# Findings: repairing trouble by *veiling silences*

- avoidance, denial, deflection, **reframing**, and intellectualizing
- veiled silences → do not know how else to respond
- “results in a deflection that, although often not intentional, is purposeful nonetheless” (Mazzei, 2004: 30)



# reframing

- **‘automatic childbearing’**
  - having children happens spontaneously after marriage
  - No/very little conscious deliberation/overt discussion
- **two central & inter-connected discursive resources**
  1. romance/love script
  2. canonical couple narrative
- **socio-cultural norms** (about passion, romantic love, gender, and ‘normal’ heterosexual adult development) make it possible for participants to
  - negotiate alternative positive positions
  - Reframe passive/non-planning positively & “save face”
- Spontaneous, romantic, ‘natural’ scenario vs. calculated, cold, scientific scenario → reinforce automatic childbearing
- **male involvement discursively shifted to the background**



# Meaning and implications of veiled silences

- suggest no specific role for men
- automatic childbearing key discursive resource for veiling silences and obscuring gender roles
- Family planning and reproduction as a female issue & responsibility
- Limitation of women's autonomy

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