

“Give my baby everything I didn’t have”

A study of young men’s experiences of fatherhood

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DECLARATION

I certify that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not concurrently being submitted for any degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy being studied at the University of Greenwich. I also declare that this work is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise identified by references and that I have not plagiarised the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of young fatherhood has not been widely addressed in academic research, and until recently most studies on young parenthood have concentrated mainly on teenage mothers. This thesis explores how men who became fathers at a young age narrate their experiences of fathering and their perceptions of fatherhood. The focus is thus both on the practical experience of being a father as well as in the values the young men hold in relation to fatherhood and fathering. Such exploration is done in relation to being a man, being young and coming from what is typically considered a socially excluded background. The findings are based on individual qualitative interviews with 22 young men from ethnic minority backgrounds who were living in London, mainly in areas of social deprivation. This study adds to the growing body of research on young fatherhood generally and to research on the father-child relationship specifically.

Drawing on structuration theory, discourse and social capital as the theoretical basis, this thesis explores how young men build, practice and understand their role as fathers and their one to one relationship with their child or children. The specific focus on the father-child relationship springs from the limited research on this aspect of young fatherhood. This study found that when it comes the practice of fathering there are little differences between young and older fathers: their worries, their hopes and their future projections can be considered similar. The research highlighted that fathers aimed to make a positive contribution to their children's lives by caring for them in the early days and also later on, by playing and educating them. The relationship with the mother appeared to be an essential part of the experience of fatherhood, both in relation to quality and quantity of contact. This thesis found that young men emphasised the influence of family and community background in shaping their experiences of fatherhood. The findings of this study shed light into the practice of fathering amongst young men and contribute to understanding young parents' relationship dynamics from the male perspective. Finally, it helps understand the influence of background on young fathers' life chances and future prospects.

Overall, the young men in this research were able to fulfill their desire to be there for their children, sometimes in adverse circumstances and against a variety of hurdles. And despite the problems encountered, the young men offered a positive view on the experience of fatherhood, focusing not only on the tensions but also on the rewards of being a father.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

This study partly originates from a voiced concern in academic circles about the limited research on young fatherhood, particularly compared to the numerous studies on young mothers (Swann *et al*, 2003; Duncan *et al*, 2010; Holgate *et al*, 2006). An added reason to conduct this project was my interest in the field of family research. As an undergraduate student I did a dissertation on the topic of women's experiences of divorce in Spain. I interviewed two generations of women, those from the dictatorship and those from the democratic period¹, and compared their experiences. For my Masters dissertation I continued with this comparative analysis amongst the same generations of women, but this time I researched relationship and family formation. When the opportunity to do a doctorate on the subject of fatherhood arrived, I was motivated by the idea of doing a study from the male perspective. Up until that moment all my research had been from the female standpoint. Moreover, I found the specific subject of young fatherhood very interesting from the onset, due to its originality as well as my little knowledge of it. It felt like I was truly like embarking on a research trip without a map.

At the time when this research started, teenage pregnancy was top of the agenda for the New Labour government, which was then in power. As a result, the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was set up in 1999 and it aimed to halve the number of under-16 conceptions by 2010 (this is explored in detail in chapter 2). With the taking of power of the Coalition government in 2010 the policy approach to teenage pregnancy changed. The Coalition government ceased the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and did not set up a replacement program (Local Government Association, 2013). Instead, teenage pregnancy became part of a wider policy remit as the government "increased the focus on early intervention, parenting and targeted support for 'troubled families'" (Rudoe, 2014:293).

In relation to the literature on young fatherhood, my initial review suggested that many of the studies done until the first decade of the 2000s had focused on the negative side of young fathers' lives. For example, some studies argued that the majority of young fathers, like young mothers, have experienced disadvantaged childhoods (Kiernan, 1995; SEU, 1999). Others pointed out that young fathers have lower educational attainment, poorer employment and housing prospects than childless young people and as a result are more likely to be benefit reliant (Stein, 1997; Speak *et al*, 1997; Kiernan, 1995; Tyrer *et al*, 2005; SEU, 1999). Young fathers had also been found to be more vulnerable to having poor mental health (Simms

¹ Spain was under a fascist dictatorship from the end of the Spanish civil war in 1939 until the death of Franco, its dictator, in 1975

and Smith, 1986). Research suggested that crime and young offending is common amongst young fathers (Tyrer *et al*, 2005). Finally, the image portrayals of young fathers in policy and media outlets are often negative (Duncan, 2007). However, I realised that new research has flourished in the past few years that offer a more positive and less catastrophic view of youthful parenthood (Duncan *et al*, 2010; Arai, 2009; Holgate *et al*, 2006). This could be understood as a reaction to all the negative views on teenage parenthood. In turn, positive portrayals help balance the debates on youthful pregnancy as they offer an alternative lens by which to investigate the issue. This thesis aims to contribute to research that attempts to study young parenthood under a more positive and less catastrophic light.

1.2 The need for this research

Despite a slowly growing interest in young fatherhood, young fathers continue to be an under-researched group (Duncan *et al*, 2010). Typically research on youthful pregnancy and parenthood has concentrated on young women's experiences, with young dads often being ignored or represented through the eyes of the mother (Reeves, 2006). The limited existing research shows that there are practical impediments for young men to fulfill their role as fathers, however, despite these difficulties young fathers often express a strong desire to be there for their children (Quinton *et al*, 2002; Tyrer *et al*, 2005; Speak *et al*, 1997; Reeves 2006). It can be argued that an awareness of the type of difficulties young fathers experience is important in order to help them have a relationship with their children. Thus knowing their difficulties and needs, which are often linked to their background, may for example help in creating the right social policies. This thesis was built acknowledging that the background of young fathers may not always offer the most favourable situation to develop a fathering role. However, as Speak *et al* (1997) defend, it is important to focus on young fathers strengths, not only on their weaknesses. Indeed, focusing on the strengths contributes to helping young fathers, as it provides an indication of what works for them. For this reason, one of the focuses of the research is young fathers' efforts and willingness to have a relationship with their children despite experiencing adverse circumstances. Another area under exploration is young fathers' actual parenting practices, and what influences their parenting behaviour.

Until recently there were few studies that specifically addressed the issue of fathers' perceptions of their relationship with their child or children (Quinton *et al*, 2002; Speak *et al*, 1997), and research on this topic has flourished in recent years (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011). Consequently, little was known about young fathers' fathering role (SEU, 1999; Swann *et al*, 2003) and how practical issues as well as issues of identity impact on the actual father-child relationship and its future prospects. In this sense, this study originated from a concern about the limited research that specifically explored the relationship that young fathers have with their children, from the perspective of the young fathers. The focus of the study would thus be the relationship that both resident and non-resident young fathers describe having

with their children and how it may be shaped by life events and transitions as well as external influences, as perceived by them. It was important to include young non-resident fathers as their views and experiences are even more under-represented than those of resident young fathers (Speak *et al*, 1997; Tyrer *et al*, 2005). This posed a greater challenge, as non-resident young fathers are even a more difficult group to gain access to (Tyrer *et al*, 2005; Reeves, 2006). But it was a challenge worth facing in order to give voice to this particular group of young fathers and to gain a greater understanding about their lives.

1.3 Approach to the study

It was decided that due to the aim of this study I would not be measuring involvement, or looking for some cause and effect in relation to young fathers' involvement, but rather I was to explore it from their perspective. Experiences such as how young fathers describe relating to their children, their perceptions of their role, their motivations as well as how relationships may affect their perceived capability to father were the kind of topics I was aiming to address. I was therefore trying to find out about processes, feelings and experiences as well as the context in which those took place. Thus it was apparent from these aims that a qualitative approach was most suitable, as is explored in chapter 4. Even though there is limited quantitative data on young fathers in the UK, particularly socio-demographic information such as how many there are or their ethnic and socio-economic background (Sherriff, 2007); it was beyond the reach of this thesis to investigate those issues. Moreover, my research background is qualitative and it is this approach to investigating the social world that most interests me. Added to this, in recent years, there has been a shift in the manner of doing research with children and young people, with greater encouragement to listen to their voices which invokes a qualitative approach (France, 2004).

My research aims are as follows.

1. To explore how young resident and non-resident fathers describe relating to their child(ren).
2. To investigate the impact that outside influences have in the way that resident and non-resident fathers feel about their offspring and how their perception of their roles changes, or not, as a result.
3. To research the living and familial arrangements that both groups of young fathers have and how this influences and shapes the relationship with their child.
4. To investigate the relationships that young men have with their families and their (ex) partners and how these may affect the father-child relationship.
5. To explore the role of the places and spaces in which fathering takes place, both in terms of their homes as well as neighbourhoods.

These aims point towards an exploration of both the micro and macro spheres of young fathers' lives. The micro-sphere relates to the day-to-day lives and routines of young fathers while the macro-sphere is based on the socio-cultural environments and the background of young fathers. This dual approach is in accord with Grounded Theory methodology, adopted in this study. Grounded Theory advocates the importance of investigating the micro-sphere and macro-sphere of people's lives to study the social world. Such an approach is suited to the theoretical framework of the study, which incorporates structuration theory, discourse and social capital. Structuration theory stresses the importance of the micro-sphere in the constitution of society, despite being a theory concerned with the macro-sphere (Giddens, 1984). Social capital explores the relations between people, but links it to macro processes such as social inequality and cohesion. Discourse looks at how the way certain topics are spoken about construct social reality, and its subjects. In this sense, all these theories deal with the micro and macro spheres, albeit with different emphasis.

This study is an exploration of the experience of being a father in the context of being young, rather than on the transition from young man to young father (although issues of transitions are inevitably touched upon). This was also planned to be a study about involved young fathers. It can be argued that what involved fatherhood actually means varies from father to father, regardless of age as well as amongst cultures (Gavin *et al*, 2002), particularly if we adhere to the ontological view of fatherhood as being socially constructed (Miller, 2011). In this study, involvement was not linked to residency status but more related to spending time with children and having contact with them.

This thesis is therefore based on the young fathers' perspectives of the role that they play in their child(ren)'s lives as well as the enabling and constraining influences on the ability of young men to fulfill their fathering role. An added element under investigation are the environments in which fatherhood and fathering takes place, as this thesis is not only concerned with young men's perceptions of fatherhood but with the interplay between agency and structure. Agency refers to the extent to which young men are able to navigate around external influences and exercise their self-determination. Structure, on the other hand are the pre-existing social structures, in the form of socio-cultural norms that may influence young fathers' behaviours. Therefore there is an interest in exploring the way in which the environments that young men inhabit have an influence on their behaviour, and how they deal with, and challenge, those given influences.

1.4 The young fathers

This thesis involved data from one-to-one interviews with 22 young men aged between

17 and 25 years old. All the young men, except one, were in contact with their child or children (5 fathers had more than one child), despite the way in which co-residency could be considered relatively low: 7 fathers out of 22 were cohabiting. In this thesis the term resident and non-resident father is understood in relation to living in the same household as the child on a day to day basis.

The fact that I wanted to include non-resident (but involved) fathers in my research inevitably influenced my sampling strategy. Participants were to be recruited via organizations or services that worked with young fathers, rather than via teenage mothers. Accessing fathers through mothers is a popular strategy when researching young fathers (Osborn, 2007), possibly because young mothers are more accessible. However, I considered this strategy restrictive as it would most likely mean that the fathers would either be living with their partner or on good terms. Due to my interest in investigating how relationships with partners affect the role of the father, I did not want to exclude those fathers who are no longer with the mother, and who may even have experienced problems, but continue to have a relationship with their child. I had the expectation that young fathers who were active in organizations would be active in their children's lives. All the young fathers from this research were involved in two organizations: DNA Mix and Immediate Theatre, which is discussed in detail in chapter 4.

The participants had some common points: they were all involved in organizations that had a remit for working with young fathers, they were all from what is considered ethnic minority backgrounds and all grew up or lived in areas or states with high levels of deprivation or social exclusion. In this sense, it can be argued that these young fathers' experiences of fathering and the way in which they constructed families is informed by certain aspects of their background, such as cultural influences, as well as environmental factors, such as access to resources and networks. The intersection of class, race and gender is an important factor to consider in understanding how men of ethnic minority backgrounds experience fatherhood. For example, Reynolds (2009) argues that when it comes to policies regarding non-resident fathers the focus has been social inequalities that result from living apart from children and that "largely neglected is the wider issue of structural inequalities resulting from black fathers' racial-ethnic identity and racial divisions in society" (Reynolds, 2009:13). In this sense, this thesis contributes to widening the understanding of how the background of ethnic minority young fathers influences their experience, understanding, and the practice of fathering.

Despite similar backgrounds, the different trajectories in these young men's lives were apparent, for example some had continued studying while others had stopped school. A small minority were involved in crime, with two young fathers having been in jail. Due to the wide range of ages of the young fathers, I use both the expression "teenage" and "young" to refer to fatherhood or pregnancy, in order to represent this variety. Some young men became fathers in their teenage years, while others did so in their early twenties.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis has nine chapters, including this first introductory chapter. Each chapter has a specific focus. However all the chapters feed into each other and are in this sense complementary. Outlined below is an overview of the eight main chapters providing a summary of the thesis structure and content.

Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature on the 3 main areas of interest in this thesis: teenage pregnancy, fatherhood and young fatherhood. First, it explores the issue of the problematisation of teenage pregnancy. The particular focus is the UK context at the turn of 21st century and the often made link between social exclusion and teenage pregnancy. However, new social policy developments in the landscape of teenage pregnancy in recent years are briefly explored.

Overall it argues that the problematisation of teenage pregnancy has created negative discourses, which in turn affects the experiences of parenthood amongst young people. Secondly, the literature moves on to explore the issue of fatherhood generally. It can be argued that expectations surrounding the roles of young fathers are similar to those of older fatherhood. I want to explore the parameters against which young fathers' roles are measured. Finally, the literature on young fatherhood specifically is reviewed. It is acknowledged in this thesis that while certain aspects of the experience of fatherhood amongst young men may be similar to that of older fathers, there are also age-specific issues that arise in young fathers' lives. It was therefore deemed important to look at the findings of young fatherhood, to identify trends and gaps, and explore what issues actually arise in the lives of men who become fathers at a young age.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework to the thesis with a focus on the main theories used: structuration theory, discourse and social capital. Structuration deals with one of the founding questions of sociology: the recurrent relationship between the social structure and the individual. Giddens' work and theory of structuration is revised in this section. In this thesis structuration is used in order to see the extent to which young fathers are able to challenge structural difficulties, and by doing so contribute to changing the social structure. Discourse theory is based on the idea that language creates social reality, and the French thinker Foucault is its most influential proponent. Discourses are used as a tool to explore the manner in which the lives of young fathers may be influenced by circulating discourses, in relation to teenage pregnancy and fatherhood, amongst others. Finally, social capital theories, which defend the idea of the benefits of non-monetary resources, such as the connection between people and education, are used. This seemed particularly important in order to explore what young fathers could contribute to their children's lives that move away from the role of the economic provider.

Chapter 4 provides the rationale for the use of a qualitative approach to studying the social world and describes the research process. This chapter starts with a discussion of the main features of qualitative research. It then moves on to discuss qualitative interviewing and why it was considered a good research tool for this study. Grounded Theory is discussed in order to give the analytical framework of the study. The practice of doing research, including recruiting participants, dealing with ethics, carrying out the interviews and analysing them form the basis of the last part of this chapter.

Chapter 5 to 8 presents the analysis of the data constructed in the interview.

The first analysis chapter, number 5, reports on the news of the pregnancy and how young men feel about becoming fathers. This includes the thinking process behind keeping the baby, or not, and their views on abortion. It then looks at the negotiation with the mother of the baby, as well as the family's reaction and support. The final section is dedicated to young fathers' experiences of being at the birth of their child and its significance.

Chapter six has at its core the role of the father. It starts with a look at experiences of baby care and how this is the first co-parenting experiences of young couples. It is followed by a section on the father role, including looking after babies as well as playing and educating toddlers. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to the way in which young fathers spoke about the emotional bond with their children.

Chapter seven explores fatherhood and fathering in relation to residency, focusing on cohabiting experiences and the process of breaking up. The second part of the chapter focuses on non-cohabiting fathers and their reasons not to live with their child.

Chapter eight, the last analysis chapter, offers an exploration of the themes of neighbourhoods and young fathers' upbringings. It investigates the networks that young fathers had access to and how they perceived it affected their life chances. This chapter then investigates the influence of not having had a constant father figure in young men's lives. Overall, these first two sections highlight the impact that growing up in deprived neighbourhoods and without fathers have on young men's experiences of fatherhood. In particular, these section concentrate on what young fathers' want for their children as well as their current and future concerns. The next section of the chapter is dedicated to exploring how young fathers perceived they were treated by professionals. Finally, the chapter highlights an under-researched area: how young fathers felt fathering in public and how they felt they were perceived by society.

The last chapter offers a discussion of the key themes of the thesis, its limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Until recently most research on young parenthood has concentrated solely on teenage mothers, with young dads often being ignored or represented through the eyes of the mother (Reeves, 2006; Holgate *et al*, 2006). Consequently, the knowledge on young fathers is still limited, and less is known about their experiences and needs than those of young mothers (SEU, 1999; Swann *et al*, 2003, Hirst *et al*, 2006; Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2014). However, it can be argued that interest in young fatherhood is increasing as evidenced by a growing body of studies that focus on this particular group, both in the UK and the US.

This chapter offers a review of the literature on three topics: youthful and teenage pregnancy (with a focus on its problematisation), fatherhood generally and thirdly young fatherhood specifically, and there are different reasons to have chosen these three areas. First, youthful pregnancy in the UK, and in other countries in the west, has been largely conceptualized as a problem and it has generally been presented as negative (Holgate *et al*, 2006; Duncan, 2007; Arai, 2009). As Holgate *et al* (2006) explain, in relation to youthful pregnancy there are “multiple negative perspectives arising from national social agencies and the media” and “public perception is shaped by negative stereotyping” (Holgate *et al*, 2006:4). In this sense it can be argued that a number of negative discourses around teenage and youthful pregnancy exist affecting both young mothers and fathers on different levels: from the way they may be seen by social policy and professionals working with them to how they are treated by people in their lives such as partners, family, peers and neighbours. It may therefore be deemed important to explore the issue of the problematisation of teenage pregnancy as the experience of young fatherhood can be thought of as inseparable from it. This, it can be argued is due to the way in which young fathers are often seen as contributing to the problem of teenage and youthful pregnancy and the negative discourses surrounding it. Arguably, the way in which they contribute to the problematisation of teenage pregnancy is by being “absent” (Arai, 2009) or “reckless” (Reeves, 2006), as they are commonly represented. At the same time, young men’s experiences of fatherhood may be affected by those same discourses.

Added to this there is the expectation that teenage and young fathers will play the same role in their children’s lives as older fathers. Particularly, it is clear from policy documents in the UK (as will be seen later), that young fathers are expected to fulfill one of the main responsibilities attached to fatherhood: providing. This led me to the realisation that expectations surrounding the roles of young fathers may be similar to those of older fatherhood. For this reason I decided to review the literature on fatherhood generally; as I wanted to explore the parameters by which young fathers’ roles are measured.

Finally, the literature on young fatherhood specifically is reviewed. It is acknowledged in this thesis that certain aspects of the experience of fatherhood amongst young men may be similar to that of older fathers, for example the emotional bond with their children. However it can be argued that, despite some similarities, there is also age-specific issues that arise in young fathers' lives, often related to aspects of youth-transitions. It was therefore deemed important to review the findings of young fatherhood, to identify trends and gaps, and to explore what issues actually arise in the lives of men who become fathers at a young age.

At the beginning of the study, a preliminary search for the most relevant literature on young fatherhood was carried out in order to identify gaps in the research and areas to which this thesis could make a contribution to. Initially my first supervisor at the time (Jane Reeves) guided me to the most relevant studies, and this served as the starting point. Subsequently, and prior to the development of the interview topic guide, the literature search was widened. Thus the first literature search was carried out in 2007, and it was then updated every 3 months which was the interval in which new searches were done. Measures were put in place to ensure that the literature search was undertaken systematically and that all relevant material to the thesis was obtained and read. These included consulting a variety of sources, doing regular searches, setting and inclusion criteria and deciding on key terms.

The types of literature that were included in the review were: academic journal articles, academic books, PhD thesis, and grey literature including Government and organisations' reports. Organisations that were consulted were the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council, the National Centre for Social Research, the Trust For the Study of Adolescence, the Young Fatherhood Network and the Fatherhood Institute. In addition to this, a google alert with different themes such as 'young/teenage fatherhood', 'teenage pregnancy', 'fatherhood' was set up in order to receive news-related e-mails of these issues. I undertook key word searches of various media resources, such as the BBC and The Guardian with the purpose of both keeping up to date with media portrayals of youthful pregnancy and parenting as well as reviewing past articles.

Academic and research articles were accessed via the University of Greenwich online database. Swetswise, an online platform containing the majority of journal articles the University held, was mainly used to identify the academic literature. Books were accessed both at the University's own library as well as at the British Library. The British Library Ethos platform, which contains electronic copies of all Phds published in the UK served to identify doctorate studies on the topic under research. Finally, grey literature was obtained directly from the Government or organisations' web pages.

In accordance with my area of interest the search terms included were: teenage/youthful pregnancy, young/teenage father(hood), and young/teenage parent(hood).

Inclusion criteria were decided and applied to the searches and were as follows:

- Systematic reviews, literature reviews, peer reviewed articles, government and organization's reports published between 1997 and 2015.
- Papers written in English language.
- National and international research studies.
- Studies of both qualitative and quantitative nature.
- Articles or studies that included at least one of the key terms in their title or abstract.
- Papers in the areas of sociology, social policy, social psychology and nursing.

The inclusion criteria, the variety of sources and the regularity of searches helped me identify the most relevant studies and the research that would help me build a clear and comprehensive understanding of the field and all the different aspects that were to be include.

The literature chapter starts with two introductory sections that aim to set the general context of teenage pregnancy generally and young fatherhood specifically. This is followed by the three main sections of the literature review. First, an exploration of debates on youthful and teenage pregnancy is offered, with a particular focus on the problematisation of this issue. The focus is on the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy set up by the Labour Government in 1999, who were then in power, as this is the policy context and social climate in which the research took place. Contemporary fatherhood conceptualisations is the area under review of the second main part of this chapter, and include an exploration of the role of the father as provider versus new fatherhood ideals. Finally, the chapter ends with a review of two aspects of young fatherhood, including the deterrents to involvement found by young men as well as their provider and carer roles.

2.1 Youthful pregnancy and parenthood: setting the context

The concept of “teenage pregnancy” emerged in the late 1960s in the US and became widely used in the 1970s, a time when, contrary to public perception, pregnancy rates amongst that age group were declining (Furstenberg, 2007). A similar scenario was found in England in the late 90s and beginning of 2000s: while teenage conceptions rates were the same as in the 1950s, they were portrayed and perceived as being at an all time high (Duncan, 2007). This continues to be the case and despite a recent steep decline in teenage pregnancy rates

(ONS, 2015), there still exists the perception amongst the British public that the numbers are increasing. Indeed, a recent survey showed that 80% of those taking part wrongly believed that teenage pregnancy rate was on the rise (Ipsos Mori, 2014).

Such portrayal, and subsequent public perception, could be partly related to the relative high teenage birth rate in the UK compared to their European counterparts. In 2012, the UK birth rate among women aged 15-19 was 19.7 births per 1,000 women, compared with 12.6 births among the 28 countries of the European Union (EU28). However, it is important to point out that the teenage pregnancy rate between 2004 and 2012 decreased more steadily in the UK than in the EU28: while in the UK it fell by 27% in the EU28 the decline during those years was 19%. Similarly the under 18 birth rate has also shown a greater decline in the UK than in the EU28, with the birth rate among the 15-17 falling by 32% compared with 16% in the EU28. This steep decline in the UK coincides with the fact that in 2013 the under-18 conception rate were at their lowest since 1969 with 24.5 conceptions per 1,000 women (ONS, 2015). However, it is argued that comparisons between countries can be misleading as they do not compare like with like. Differences in the size of the countries, their socio-economic stratification or religious backgrounds are not taken into account, all of which contribute to the teenage pregnancy phenomenon in differing ways (Arai, 2009).

Condemnation of teenage pregnancy not only arises due to the relative high numbers, but also from the supposed disadvantage and negative consequences suffered by teenage mothers and their children. For example, research suggests that two years after giving birth, mothers under 20 have a 30% greater risk of suffering a mental illness (Department of Health, 2014). It is estimated that amongst women aged 16-18 who are not in education, 21% are teenage mothers (Department of Education, 2013). Poverty has been found to be an issue too, with teenage mothers being 22% more likely to live in poverty by age 30 than women who have children after 24 (Mayhew and Bradshaw, 2005). Concerns exist for the well-being of their children, as babies born to teenage mothers have a 41% greater risk of infant mortality (ONS, 2014) and a 63% greater risk to live in poverty (HM Government, 2014).

However, in their review of teenage pregnancy outcomes, Hazel *et al* (2012:13) concluded that the evidence of the long-term impact of teenage motherhood is limited and thus they argue that

Current econometric evidence suggests that mother's age at first birth per se accounts for relatively few of the negative long term socioeconomic outcomes experienced by people who are born with disadvantage (Hazel et al, 2012:13).

For this reason, Hazel *et al* (2012) argue that policy efforts should be targeted towards reducing disadvantage rather than simply preventing teenage pregnancy. Indeed, official statistics suggest that teenage pregnancy rates tend to be concentrated in socially disadvantaged areas (DCSF/DoH, 2010). Overall, teenage pregnancy can be considered a complex issue that appears to be influenced by a variety of factors, which increase the likelihood of conception and subsequent maternity as well as paternity. These risk factors, which affect both young and teenage men and women, have been grouped into the following: “risky behaviours; education-related factors; and family and social circumstances” (Department of Education, accelerating the strategy, 2006:10). Risky behaviors include issues such as early sexual activity, alcohol and substance misuse or poor contraceptive use. In relation to education, it has been found that low educational attainment is a strong factor. For example, in areas with similar levels of deprivation, those with greater educational attainment had lower teenage pregnancy rates than the areas where fewer were in education. Being in care and having a teenage mother, have all been identified as risk factors for greater likelihood of becoming a young parent (DFES, 2006a:10).

Another risk factor is ethnicity. However knowing its exact role is made difficult by the fact that ethnic background is not recorded at birth registration. Available Census data on mothers under 19 pointed out ‘Mixed White and Black Caribbean’, ‘Other Black’ and ‘Black Caribbean’ ethnicity, as being the ethnic groups with higher incidence of births. While ‘White British’ were also over represented, all Asian groups were under-represented (DFES, 2006a). It is argued by Lemos (2009) that different variables are at play in explaining the different ethnic rates of teenage pregnancy: from cultural and parental restrictions on the onset of sexual activity, to attitudes to contraceptive use as well as to intimacy and relationships. In his view, for both men and women “the ethnic variable arises not from a deterministic view of how certain groups are bound to behave but from the effects of a complex interaction of... factors” (Lemos, 2009:6). It is argued by Winters and Winters (2012) that the influence of race and socio economic status is complex, and their effect differ in relation to the state of the economy. Their research shows that during prosperous economic times, no difference was found between different ethnic groups. This led them to conclude that “the ways in which race and class affect teenage pregnancy are complex and dynamic and respond to changes in the economy uniquely for different groups of teenagers” (Winters & Winters, 2012:1). Despite this complexity, ethnicity appears to be an important underlying factor which influences the likelihood of becoming a teenage or young parent, even when deprivation is controlled for. For example, some London neighborhoods with similar rates of deprivation but different ethnic make-up show differing teenage pregnancy rates (DFES, 2006a).

2.2 Young fathers: general findings

When it comes to young fathers, there is little official statistical information available, as demographic characteristics are not routinely recorded at birth registration and mothers are not obliged to name the father (Swann *et al*, 2003). Thus there is no official demographic

data showing, for example, the ethnic or socio-economic background of young fathers, how many are resident or not or how many young fathers there are in the UK (Sherriff, 2007). Moreover, young fathers are a difficult group to access, exacerbating the lack of data that can be collected about this group (Tyrer *et al*, 2005). Latest official statistics show that out of 362,798 men who became fathers in 2013, 78,846 were under 24 representing 21,7% of the total of paternities in England and Wales. Of these, 10,007 were under 20 which is 2,8 of the total number of paternities. In relation to marital status, of men aged 20-24 there were 10,286 paternities within marriage or civil partnership and 58,553 jointly registered births outside marriage or civil partnerships. For those under 20, there were 300 men under 20 in a marriage or civil partnership who became fathers, and 9,707 who did so outside or marriage or civil partnership (ONS, 2014). However these figures exclude men who fathered a child but were not included in the birth certificate by the mother.

As explained in the introduction, compared to the numerous studies on young motherhood, (Swann *et al*, 2003; Duncan *et al*, 2010; Holgate *et al*, 2006), research on young fathers is still a limited, yet growing topic of investigation (Duncan *et al*, 2010; Arai, 2009; Neale and Lau-Clayton 2014; Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014). It is for this reason, that what is known about young fathers is often extrapolated from research on young motherhood, given that their backgrounds, as research suggests, are similar (Bunting and McCauley, 2004). Thus, young fatherhood, like young motherhood is embedded in, and inseparable from social exclusion debates and this is mainly due to the link between young fatherhood and socio-economic disadvantage (Fatherhood Institute, 2013). There are certain predictors of early entry into fatherhood such as low socio economic status (SES), own father absence or having a young, or single, mother amongst others (Pears *et al*, 2005; Bunting, 2005). A recent comprehensive review of research on young fatherhood undertaken by Kiselica and Kiselica (2014) concluded that the following characteristics make young men under 20 more likely to become fathers: poverty, low academic achievement (including dropping out from school), crime and gang engagement, substance misuse, being the victim of physical or sexual abuse, poor mental health, having a young and/or single mother, poor family relationships and unsatisfactory father-son relationships (including father absence as well as father neglect and abuse). Both research from the UK (DFES, 2006a) and from the US (Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014) have demonstrated that these risk factors are cumulative and multiple factors significantly increase the chances of teenage parenthood. A UK study on the experience of teenage parenthood and social exclusion concluded that it was previous “poverty and social marginalisation” not teenage pregnancy per se that put young mothers at a disadvantage (DFES, 2007:4). The same could be applied to the experience of fatherhood among young and teenage men. Considering poverty and exclusion as a cause rather than a consequence of teenage parenthood has important consequences for policy making and professional practice, as will be discussed in chapter 9.

The implications of the cumulative effect of risk factors, Kiselica and Kiselica (2014) argue, make the experience of young fatherhood a complex and complicated one. As they explain,

extensive research shows that the experience of early paternity tends to bring on many hardships, especially for males raised in multiproblem families and communities. These difficulties can have a detrimental impact on a young man's adjustment to fatherhood (Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014:262).

Thus it can be argued that teenage and youthful fatherhood is affected by an array of factors partly related to their socially excluded position, which include socio economic and ethnic background, as explained earlier. In the UK, fatherhood appears to be more common amongst young men of ethnic minority backgrounds, mainly Bangladeshi, African and Caribbean as well as Pakistani (Higginbottom *et al*, 2005). Another influences can be considered age per se. The normative age at which to become a father has progressively become later in life (Cartmel and Furlong, 2007), and it is argued that becoming a parent earlier than the wider societal convention stipulates, has consequences for the experience of fatherhood. Becoming a young or teenage parent has been conceptualized as a fast-track transition to adulthood (Jones, 2002). Fast track transitions, as opposed to slow track ones, are characterised by leaving school early, coupled with an augment in the risk of unemployment or underemployment as well as early family formation (SEU, 2005). Another view on this same issue is that when becoming a father at a young age two transitions superimpose: the psychosocial transition to parenthood with the regular teenager to adult transition (Ross *et al*, 2010). Arguably, early transitions into parenthood are considered out of synch and can carry particular consequences for how young men enact their fathering role. Thus, for example, young fathers' accelerated transition into family formation is often associated to other features of fast transitions, such as having few educational qualifications (Kiernan, 1995; Wellings *et al*, 2001) and suffering unemployment (Speak *et al*, 1997).

In addition, there is a greater chance that young dads will be benefit-reliant (Allen and Dowling, 1998; SEU, 1999) as well as having poor mental health (Simms and Smith, 1986; Fagan, 2007) and become young offenders (Tyrrer *et al*, 2005). However, research shows that when compared to men from similar socio economic backgrounds, young fathers current situation and future prospects are no less advantageous (Rouch, 2005; Winters and Winters, 2012). Moreover, it is argued that the situation some young fathers may find themselves in, such as being unemployed, may mean that they can be involved in their children's lives in a different way to their own fathers. Indeed, this view could encourage the role of the carer as one that young fathers can take, thus contributing to their children's lives in a more practical way. For example, the absence of set work may entail greater flexibility to get involved in other tasks such as taking the child to the doctor or babysitting if the mother goes to school

or work (Tyrer *et al* 2005; Reeves, 2006). Generally, research shows that young men have been increasingly involved in their children's lives (Speak *et al*, 1997). It can be argued that portrayals of young fatherhood based upon wide society's ideals on age appropriate transitions do not take into account cultural specific norms regarding young parenthood (Jones, 2003). Indeed, particularly amongst some BME groups, young parenthood is often not regarded a problem but as 'normal', or common practice (Higginbottom *et al*, 2006).

Arguably, such negative views on the early entry into fatherhood do not acknowledge that there are positives that can be drawn from the situation, particularly for men from socially excluded backgrounds. Involvement in their children's lives has been found to positively contribute towards young fathers' well-being and self-esteem, having therefore the potential to positively impact on their lives and in turn to help strengthen the father-child bond (Foster, 2004; Glickman, 2004). Small-scale studies with a focus on young father involvement have found that young fathers put value on being available for their children (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011; Tyrer *et al*, 2005; Reeves, 2006; Wilkes *et al*, 2011) usually expressed in terms of "being there" (Speak *et al*, 1997; Cater and Coleman, 2006). They emphasize the need to provide support for their children, both financial and emotional, which often starts by improving one's own life, including the take-up of education (Lemay *et al*, 2010). Finally, providing better quality parenting to the one they received has been found to be central to the experience of fathering amongst young men (Wilkes *et al*, 2011; Lemay *et al*, 2010). However their desire to be involved is not always matched by their lived realities. Difficulties do exist for young fathers and these are often rooted in their background, as explained above. Neale and Lau-Clayton list young fathers main difficulties as being:

conflicting identities and lifestyles, difficult negotiations with the mother and one or both sets of grandparents, practical issues of income, housing, and schooling, and, in many cases, complex needs arising from troubled childhoods (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011:1).

However, despite encountering difficulties, qualitative studies looking specifically into young fatherhood have found that contrary to common perceptions of young fathers as disinterested, their involvement, or willingness to be involved, is often greater than may be expected of them (Fatherhood Institute, 2013). Australian research on young fatherhood found that the young fathers were determined to continue the relationship with their children even if the romantic relationship with the mother broke down (Wilkes *et al*, 2011). Recent research by Neale and Lau-Clayton in the UK (2014) show that "young fathers may have a strong commitment to developing a fathering identity and that unplanned children are not necessarily unwanted" (p. 69). Their longitudinal study of young fathers in the North of England found that fatherhood gave young men a sense of direction and responsibility, however, help from families and professionals was essential in meeting their many needs and keeping them

involved. However, it can be argued that the combination of self-reinforcing difficulties and the limited support they often received means that young fathers are reportedly more likely to lose contact with their children. This is evidenced by qualitative studies indicating the various difficulties that young fathers face stay when trying to stay in touch with their children regularly and particularly over time (Bunting and McAuley, 2004; Florsheim, 2014; Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014).

In relation to professional practice it is argued that

Although many scholars have noted the gender imbalance across parenting services and policies, the failure to serve adolescent fathers relative to adolescent mothers is arguably the most striking imbalance (Bellamy and Balman, 2014:281).

The support and preparation that young men receive in their transition to parenthood appears to be limited, and they are often not encouraged to play a role in their children's lives, as evidenced by research from the past two decades (Speak *et al*, 1997; Quinton *et al*, 2002; Tyrer *et al*, 2005;). It is argued that such practices are reportedly based upon professionals viewing young fathers as being transient figures in their children's lives (Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014). The role that professionals can play include the offering of both practical and emotional support (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011) in order to ameliorate the difficulties faced.

Overall, young fatherhood can be considered a complex and multi-layered phenomenon. In particular young fathers are faced with a combination of problems, which mainly relate to their background. (Quinton *et al*, 2005). As a result they are at a greater risk of suffering parenting stress, having potential adverse consequences for their relationship with their children (Fagan *et al*, 2007). Despite this, young fathers are willing to be involved in their children's lives, contradicting popular negative images (Speak *et al*, 1997; Reeves, 2006). While the still highly valued breadwinner role may be a difficult one for young fathers to adopt due to their lack of social and economic resources. (Sigle-Rushton, 2005) their unemployed status may mean they enjoy greater flexibility, giving them the chance to care for their children (Tyrer *et al*, 2005). It could be argued that because young fathers' needs are multiple, offering professional support is essential in supporting young men to sustain the father-child bond (Florsheim, 2014).

2.3 The problematisation of youthful pregnancy

Public discourse in Britain sees teenage motherhood as a pernicious social problem where mothers, their children and society generally will all suffer. Fathers are seen as feckless (Duncan, 2007:307).

Since the late 1970s, successive British Governments have held and promoted a view of teenage pregnancy as being problematic, both to the individual and to society. This problematisation of teenage pregnancy has been applied to a number of areas: from health, to economics, to a decline of morality and values (Arai, 2009; Duncan *et al*, 2010). However, the view of teenage pregnancy as undesirable, both on a personal and social level, is not limited to England but also applies to other developed countries with high numbers of teenage pregnancy, such as the United States or New Zealand (Holgate *et al*, 2006). This section reviews key issues around the perception of teenage pregnancy as a problem, particularly in England, and where young fathers are located within those discourses.

2.3.1 The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy

In England, teenage pregnancy was put at the top of the political agenda as a social problem that needed tackling by the Labour Government that came into power in 1997. As argued by Hoggart (2012:534) although concerns about teenage pregnancy predated and outlived the elected Labour Government, “it was, however, only during the years of New Labour that a specific strategy was devised and funded”. The teenage pregnancy strategy was part of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), which was set up in December 1997. Their remit was to help improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing ‘joined-up solutions to joined-up problems’ (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004).

The strategy was based on a report entitled “Teenage Pregnancy” published in 1999 and it included a foreword by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair. It is argued that this report set the policy framework and tone for the way in which teenage pregnancy was perceived and represented in the decade to come (Duncan, 2007). In the foreword, Blair (SEU, 1999:4) points out that “the cycle of despair in which many teenage parents are trapped” and how “too many teenage mothers – and fathers – simply fail to understand the price they, their children and society, will pay”. Moreover, it also points out that “our failure to tackle this problem has cost the teenagers, their children and the country dear” (SEU, 1999:4). What is important about this report is that until its publication the debate around teenage pregnancy, and particularly its problematisation, had focused on women under 16. However, the new teenage pregnancy strategy expanded the category to include the over 18s, which according to Macvarish *et al* (2010:48) “not only this instantly inflates the perceived problem, it also

redefines it". They argue that because those over 16 are more likely to go through with the pregnancy this means that the debates shifts from unintended pregnancies, to young women actually taking the pregnancy to term and having children.

The focus of the strategy was going to be twofold: on the one hand reduce teenage pregnancy, setting the specific target of halving the number of under 16 pregnancies by 2010 (which was not achieved). The other aim was to support teenage parents, particularly mothers, by encouraging the take-up of education and training. Such aim was in tune with the three main reasons given for the relative high number of teenage pregnancies: low aspirations, ignorance about contraception and mixed messages about sex (SEU, 1999:7).

In relation to low aspirations, the argument was that some teenagers "see no reason not to get pregnant" (SEU, 1999:7). The explanation put forward was that young people of disadvantaged backgrounds have little expectations in relation to both education and labour market opportunities. This means that there is a perceived inevitability on their side that they will end up living on benefits. Secondly, the teenage pregnancy strategy was founded upon the idea that young people in England "lack accurate knowledge about contraception, STDs, what to expect in relationships and what it means to be a parent" (SEU, 1999:7). To illustrate this point, the SEU report compared the relatively low contraceptive use of English teenagers with that of young people in other northern European countries as well as the US. Moreover, the 1999 report argued that teenage parents were unprepared for the difficulties, both economic and emotional, of bringing up a child. Finally, the third reason given is the so-called mixed messages in relation to sex and contraception that teenagers received in contemporary society. On the one hand, it was argued, that one part of the adult world was giving the message that "sexual activity is the norm" while the other part "is at best embarrassed and at worst silent, hoping that if sex isn't talked about, it won't happen" (SEU, 1999:7). This, the SEU believed, did not mean less sex among teenagers, but less contraceptive use.

These arguments have been questioned by different researchers. For example, Gale (2008:110) believes that the "lack of meaningful dialogue about contraception between young couples...may lead to unplanned pregnancy". Gale (2008) offers an explanation of the different routes via which young couples may fail to use contraception, steering away from the SEU argument about lack of knowledge or mixed messages. Indeed, she explains how contraceptive use among young people may not be a straightforward matter. In this sense, she argues that despite sex education being compulsory, when it comes to young men they often place the responsibility on the young woman. Moreover, she explains how unprotected sex among young men is perceived as a risk-taking activity which enhances their sexual identity. The view of lack of knowledge around contraception is also contested

by Duncan (2007:308), who believes that “the research evidence does not support” official accounts of those causes of teenage pregnancy.

The strategy did not appear to be inclusive of young fathers, and they were barely mentioned in the report, except for the foreword which spoke of “the importance of ensuring that teenagers are aware of the real responsibilities of being a parent, including the financial responsibilities of being a father” (SEU, 1999:4). This meant that the now scrapped Child Support Agency (CSA), which tried to ensure that fathers paid maintenance for their children, was given “a bigger role...to ensure that all fathers, including teenage fathers, cannot simply walk away from their children” (SEU, 1999:5). It can be argued that such a statement implied a view of the role of fathers generally, and young fathers specifically, as being solely and mainly responsible for economic provision. It did not seem to take into account other ways in which young fathers may contribute to their children’s lives. Moreover, it equated lack of economic support with abandonment which, as will be seen in the analysis chapters of this thesis, does not necessarily apply. However, seven years after the establishment of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, the program was revised and a new report entitled “Teenage Pregnancy: Accelerating the strategy to 2010” was published. This report argued that “while the negative consequences of teenage pregnancy are felt most by young women and their children, it is important that strategies to reduce teenage pregnancy also impact on young men’s attitudes and behaviour” (DFES, 2006a:7). This was a change of tone from the previous 1999 report, which, as just explained, mainly puts emphasis on ensuring that young fathers took economic responsibility for their children (SEU, 1999).

2.3.2 Teenage pregnancy: why is it conceptualized as a problem?

One of the justifications used to put a strategy in place in order to tackle teenage pregnancy was the relative higher numbers experienced in the UK, compared to other European countries, which Tony Blair referred to as Britain’s “shameful record” (SEU,1999:4). The figures given by the 1999 report were that 90,000 teenagers fell pregnant in 1997, with 7,700 of those pregnancies being to women under 16 (SEU,1999). The report gave the impression that teenage pregnancy was at an all time high, when in fact, as mentioned before, teenage pregnancy rates had been steadily declining and were at similar levels as in the 1950s (Duncan, 2007). Thus, as Wilson and Huntington (2006:59) argue,

paradoxically, the recent constitution of teenage motherhood as an object of concern in the developed countries of the West has coincided with declining teen birth rates.

In a brief introductory history of how teenage pregnancy came to be regarded as a problem,

Arai (2009) argues its relative newness, as do Wilson and Huntington (2006). Arai (2009) and Wilson and Huntington (2006) explain that concerns in the past were directed at the marital status of the pregnant woman rather than her age. Thus the stigma was on unmarried motherhood because marriage offered economic protection to women and their children. However, by the late 1960s and early 70s in the US, and slightly later in the UK, the focus switched from marital status to age. This, Arai (2009) points out, could be related to two issues: the growing practice of cohabitation amongst the middle classes as well as extended and less linear youth transitions, which implies a view of teenage parenthood as a life path disruption.

Duncan (2007:310) argues that youthful pregnancy rates in the 1950s, which he refers to as the “ ‘golden age’ of the family”, were at the same level as in the years when the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was in place, the first decade of the new millennium. The only difference between these two historical periods, he argues, is the fact that in the 1950s most teenage pregnancies ended in marriage and some in adoption, and in the 2000s neither marriage nor adoption were the routes commonly taken. In this sense, it can be argued that the problem does not appear to be just age, but the fact that teenage motherhood is equated with unmarried motherhood, which in turn can be taken to be a synonym of lone motherhood (Holgate *et al*, 2006). Or as Duncan *et al* (2010:3) explain “public discourse about teenage parenting has become conflated with a wider social threat discourse about the decline of marriage, single parenting, and teenage sexuality”. For example, in a recent newspaper article advocating the need to respect the decision of teenagers to become mothers, the author made the point that “for young unmarried women it’s lose lose all the way. Damned if they have sex, damned if they have an abortion, damned if they decide to have and raise a child” (Braeken, 2013).

It can be argued that these views on young fatherhood that equate age of the father with single parenthood are even more marked for young fathers of black African and Caribbean (including those of mixed heritage) backgrounds, which is the demographic characteristic of the young men in this research. Young fathers from black African and Caribbean backgrounds are over represented amongst the young father population. One of the reasons is the way in which culturally, early entry into fatherhood is more common amongst this group than amongst the white population (Higginbottom *et al*, 2006). Rates of non-residential fatherhood are higher amongst the black population, both for African, Caribbean as well as mixed heritage couples (Platt, 2009), and non-resident fatherhood is often (mistakenly) equated with absent fatherhood (Reynolds, 2009). What this may mean for young men of black and mixed backgrounds, it can be argued, is that their age and ethnic background compound to their disadvantage.

In relation to the second view expressed by Arai (2009) of the role of changing youth in the problematisation of teenage pregnancy, the role of class and class held values become apparent. As Wilson and Huntington (2006:59) explain,

The pattern of higher education, the establishment of a career, and then (perhaps) starting a family, for contemporary middle-class women has gradually become normative, while those young women who do not follow this trajectory – or do so in a different order – have become the targets of marginalisation and stigmatisation.

However, young parenthood has not always been regarded as a problem and still is not in some countries, or in some communities, cultures or ethnic groups within Britain as well as abroad (Bonell, 2004; Higginbottom *et al*, 2006; Coin de Carvalho, 2007; Edin and Kefalas, 2005). Similarly, it can be said that the notion of young parenthood is socially constructed and that what is regarded as young parenthood in one country or culture may not be in another (Higginbottom *et al*, 2006). As Jones (2002:23) explains,

The problem for young people is that society seems to define some patterns of transition as inappropriate and then condemn them, even though they may be based on long-standing class or cultural traditions.

It can be argued that this clashes with some of the policies that were implemented by the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. As stated earlier, the aim of the strategy was prevention of pregnancies as well as support for young parents. However, Duncan *et al* (2010) argue that more emphasis was put on prevention rather than support. In this way, a study concerned with Black Minority Ethnic (BME) young parents found that professionals thought that too much emphasis on prevention created tensions and that there had to be a better balance between supporting young parents and prevention work (Higginbottom *et al*, 2006).

2.3.3 Teenage Pregnancy and social exclusion: 1999 and beyond

Since the publication of Teenage parenthood in 1999 by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), discussions around young parenthood in the UK became inseparable from social exclusion debates. Social exclusion perspectives suggests that a cycle of deprivation is created, in which children who are born to deprived families, or communities affected by disadvantage, are more likely to remain in this disadvantaged position and hand it down to subsequent generations (SETF, 2006). Thus, the Social Exclusion Task Force (SETF) set up in 2006, which replaced the Social Exclusion Unit (responsible for the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy), believed that

cycles of disadvantage can be broken. It is possible to mitigate the lifelong effects of social exclusion and prevent them from being passed down to future generations. Key to this is providing early and appropriate support (SETF, 2006:7).

Part of breaking down this cycle of deprivation was to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. It can be argued that this emphasis in teenage pregnancy reduction is based on the view that teenage parenthood is part of this cycle of disadvantage: young men and women born to teenage mothers are more likely to follow that family building pattern. However, according to Hawkes (2010:69) the issue here seems to be that “the starting point for all of these interventions is that the root of the problem is that the mother is young”. She argues, however, that “teenage motherhood should be more correctly viewed as a signal of prior disadvantage” (Hawkes, 2010:70). Hirst *et al*’s (2006:7) study on 3 generations of young parents corroborate this view, as they found that when young parents experienced problems, these often “arise from long-term structural, material or familial factors”. Such findings question the representation of teenage pregnancy as a problem *per se*.

In fact, there are two opposing views on why teenage parents are more likely to be socially excluded. As seen above, those who question the view of teenage pregnancy as a problem argue that “the root of social exclusion for young parents lie in poverty and deprivation, not in early parenthood *per se*” (Higginbottom *et al*, 2006:859). Thus, young people become parents earlier because they are socially excluded, rather than becoming socially excluded as a result of early family formation (Duncan, 2007). Others hold the view that young parents are more likely to be socially excluded because young parenthood disrupts their pathway into education and employment (Sigle-Rushton, 2005), maybe exacerbating their already disadvantaged position. However, as Hoggart (2012:534) argues “the ensuing debate has become rather polarised, thereby obscuring the complexity of the issue and the multiplicity of possible outcomes”. Indeed, it appears that a binary position, the either-or, may not be the best approach when it comes to teenage pregnancy, in which issue of class, gender, culture and identity mix.

2.4 Contemporary fatherhood(s)

The nature of the roles that fathers play in their children’s lives is of much interest to researchers, policy makers and professionals (Henwood and Procter, 2003) with literature on the subject substantially expanding over the last 15-20 years (Marsiglio *et al*, 2000; Matta and Knudson-Martin, 2006; Drape, 2003). According to Edwards *et al* (2009:7) the interest in fathers has sprung from what they consider “profound social changes” in the lives of men and women in western societies: a decrease of male presence in the labour market, coupled with an increase of women’s participation, particularly mothers; a greater involvement of

men in domestic and childcare tasks and a growing divorce rate. These changes have brought about new forms of fatherhood such as step-fathering and non-residential fatherhood. It is argued that these changes have affected fatherhood in a number of ways (Gillies, 2009), which have opened debates around the role of the father in contemporary society. Another contributing aspect to the interest in the role of fathers could be ascribed to the greater visibility of fatherhood and the way in which it has arguably become a “comfortable public identity” (Dermott, 2008:1). The extent to which fatherhood can be adopted as a comfortable public identity amongst young fathers is something that is explored in chapter 8.

2.4.1 Providing and caring: the roles of the contemporary western father?

In western societies most conceptualizations and research on fatherhood continue to be largely based on a dichotomy between the role of the economic provider, based on the male breadwinner family model (Lewis and Warin, 2001), and the role of the carer (Matta and Knudson-Martin, 2006; Smith *et al*, 2007), which is also referred to in the fatherhood literature as the nurturing male (Matta and Knudson-Martin, 2006), modern fatherhood (Smith *et al*, 2007), hands-on-fathering (Brannen and Nielsen, 2006) or new fatherhood (Henwood and Procter, 2003) amongst other terms. The proponents of new fatherhood argue that the role of the father as sole or main breadwinner is diminishing and that the role of the carer is gaining centre stage (Tyrrer *et al*, 2005; Featherstone, 2003). Paradoxically, it appears that fathers’ identities continue to be strongly tied up to notions of economic provision (Featherstone, 2003). Indeed, Miller (2011) argues that despite changes in the notions and practices of fathering, across all generations paid work continues to be an essential factor for fathers. Thus it appears that one characteristic of contemporary fatherhood is continuity for certain roles, such as providing, paired with change, namely a greater involvement in the children’s lives (Doucet, 2009; Hobson and Morgan, 2002). However, there are those who argue that there is incongruence between discourses of new fatherhood, and the actual day to day arrangements amongst fathers and mothers, which are still dictated by more traditional gender practices (Hobson and Morgan, 2002; Gillies, 2009). Finally, it is argued that economic contexts, cultural background, sexuality and social class (and I would add age) mean that there is not necessarily one model of fatherhood but a number of them (Flouri, 2005). As a result, as Kay (2009:7) explains, “it is increasingly unclear what the role of the father is, and perhaps even less clear what it should be”. It is in this context of complexity, of continuity and change that the role of fathers is enacted in contemporary society.

That the role of the economic provider is still prominent in fathers’ lives is not, in some ways, surprising given that despite the fact that the number of working mothers has increased, those mothers with children under 5 have the lowest rate of employment. This applies both to lone, married or cohabiting women. For example, lone mothers have an employment rate of 35% if they have children under 5, compared to 76% of those with children aged 16-18 or 68%

of those with no dependent children (ONS, 2009). Also, research shows that on average, fathers earn two thirds of the family income (Lewis and Warin, 2001). Consequently fathers' work is closely linked to breadwinning responsibilities, compared to that of mothers since fathers' employment tends to remain continuous and full-time (Brannen and Nielsen, 2006). Therefore, some argue that the change in contemporary fatherhood practice appears to be that a great number of fathers are no longer sole breadwinners, which has brought about a cultural change in the sense that providing has lost its legitimising power to exempt men from being actively involved in their children's lives (Brannen and Nielsen, 2006).

However, the extent to which the majority of fathers have been sole breadwinners throughout history is debatable. As explained by Hobson and Morgan (2002), the single male-breadwinner family was only relatively shortly lived amongst the white European and North American middle classes, peaking in the 1950s. For those of non-white and of lower socio-economic backgrounds, the single male breadwinner was not a feasible family arrangement. Therefore they argue that the often made links between the demise of the breadwinner role and the 'crisis of fatherhood' are to be taken with caution by scholars. Indeed, as Marsiglio *et al* (2000:1175) argue,

Our historical understanding of fatherhood is quite limited because materials are typically drawn from white middle-class sources and are seldom representative of their contemporaries from different ethnic, racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

Possibly due to this predominance of the white-middle class ideal of fatherhood, and despite being a short-lived western ideal, it can be argued that the male breadwinner family model seems to have permeated and set the parameters by which to measure how to be a good father. As Williams (2008:490) argues "there appears to remain a good degree of personal investment in the breadwinner role as an idealized form of fathering, bound up as it is with certain conceptions of masculinity". Similarly, Hobson and Morgan (2002:5) take the view that it is precisely male breadwinning practices as well as masculine authority within the family that are "the core of masculinity politics". Thus it may be the link between hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood and breadwinning that may be key in explaining not only its dominance, but also its prevalence.

Moreover, it is argued by Kay (2009) that one of the reasons for which this ideal may have prevailed is the way in which much social and welfare policies often "construct fathers first and foremost as financial providers for their families rather than carers and nurturers (Kay, 2009:7). When it comes to young fathers, this approach is visible in the 1999 report Teenage Pregnancy by the Labour party, then in power. As argued earlier, this report largely omitted

the potential role of the young father in their child(ren) lives, as well as their support needs. When the then Prime Minister Tony Blair made a mention in the introduction the focus was on giving a greater role to the then existing Child Support Agency.

Despite apparent changes in fatherhood practices, with the aforementioned diversification of roles, the influence of paid work on the father-child relationship should not be dismissed. Research has found that employment appears to impact on the father role on a number of levels. For example, research points out that work impacts on the time that fathers spend caring for their children in a number of ways (Smith *et al*, 2007). Fathers who are higher paid dedicate more time to caring for their children (possibly because they do not have to work as many hours as those on lower wages). Indeed, fathers who work shorter hours spend longer time caring for their children, and conversely, those who work longer hours spend less time with their children. Overall, of all fathers, those whose partners work spend the highest time looking after their children. Working lives in the family are therefore likely to dictate the available time that they have for their children not only in relation to care, but also in terms of leisure and play (Beets *et al*, 2007).

Work, or the lack of it, appears to have an impact in the attitude of fathers towards their children. Indeed, it is argued that differences amongst fatherhood practices in relation to the socio-economic position of fathers may exist. Changes in the labour market have hit hardest working class fathers, as “the decline in manual jobs, specially unskilled work, has eroded the employment opportunities of some working-class men and limited their potential to be ‘providers’” (Brannen and Nielsen, 2006:306). Golombok (2000:22) , argues that when fathers are “forced” to enter the caring role by, for example, becoming unemployed, their approach to being involved in and their impact may be not be as positive as that of fathers who chose their involvement.

2.4.2 Involved fatherhood: squeezed between two worlds

Smith *et al* (2007:1) argue that “a common conception of modern fatherhood is that there has to be a trade off between being a financial provider or an active carer”. This implies that the role of the provider and the role of the carer are seen as mutually incompatible or conflicting. However, it is argued that the dichotomy between the provider father and the caring one, in which one role excludes the other, may not be a good representation of “new fatherhood” as the complexity and intricacies of the issue are then lost (Matta and Knudson-Martin, 2006; Smith *et al*, 2007). Similarly, Henwood and Procter (2003:337) state that

neither ‘hegemonic masculinity’ nor the ‘men as part of the family’ perspectives exhaust the options for reading the gratifications and tensions advanced in men’s accounts of living contemporary fatherhood.

One of the views on this issue is that contemporary fathers are “squeezed” between the more traditional model of fathering and the new fatherhood practices (Edwards *et al*, 2009; Williams, 2008). For Edwards *et al* (2009:8) this means that “notions of social change involving the spread of fecklessness or the rise of nurturing fathers are more rhetoric than a reality”. Indeed, it is also argued that research exploring the actual lived experiences of men as fathers show that there is complexity and diversity in how men enact their fathering role, which puts into question the set meanings of involved fatherhood (Gillies, 2009).

Added to the above views there is the notion of detraditionalisation and individualisation in fatherhood. One of the views on fatherhood practices, and the roles that fathers adopt, is that they are not solely shaped by social structures and changes, but also determined by the day-to-day family circumstances. Williams (2008) argues that contemporary fathers have to construct their roles, and they do so by adapting to their personal circumstances the varying models they are presented with. In particular, Williams (2008:488) points that after Giddens’ theorization on the changing nature of intimacy “fathering is increasingly a response to personal biography and circumstances rather than being modeled on traditional ideal types of what it means to be a father”.

Another issue relevant to the conceptualisation of fatherhood is quality versus quantity in fathering, and the actual activities fathers engage in. While a number of studies have demonstrated an increase in the time that fathers spend with their children (O’Brien, 2005), others argue that the amount of time spent by fathers with their children has not in fact dramatically changed since the 1960s, rather

what has changed is men’s use of such time to get actively involved in such things as playing with their young children, bathing, changing and putting them to bed (Lewis and Warin, 2001:5).

Although in broad terms, fathers appear to be increasingly involved in childcare (Drape, 2003), there is also the belief that the childcare role adopted by fathers is questionable, with most fathers mainly getting involved in leisure activities rather than actual caring ones (Brannen and Nielsen, 2006; Golombok, 2000). These findings may indicate that many fathers play the role of secondary care-taker (Yoshida, 2012) and that mothers continue to meet the responsibility of the daily needs of children.

It is argued that the core of this issue is that there still are gender differences in the responsibility towards children (Doucet, 2009) and that parenting is still influenced by the gendered division of labour (Gillies, 2009). Others such as Edwards *et al* (2009) advocate

that the detraditionalisation of the way that men and women arrange their domestic chores gives way for more nurturing and democratic father-child relationships. This, Edwards *et al* (2009:3) explain has resulted in the fact that “rather than caring about their families through being good financial providers, good fathers are now expected actively to care for their children”. Moreover, contemporary fathers are not only expected to care for their children on practical terms, but also to be emotionally close and show affection towards them (William, 2008; Dermott, 2008), a great leap away from the role of the father as a moral teacher from colonial times (Marsiglio *et al*, 2000).

There are different conceptualisations as to what constitutes father involvement and the roles that fathers play varies amongst cultures. Gavin *et al* (2002:267) identified 5 aspects of father involvement. They argue that these are common amongst all cultures albeit with different emphasis:

- Endowment: acknowledging the child as one’s own
- Protection: protecting the child from sources of potential danger and contributing to decisions that affect the child’s welfare
- Provision: ensuring that the child’s material needs are met
- Formation: socialization activities, such as discipline and teaching
- Caregiving: meeting the physical needs of the baby by feeding, diapering, bathing and so on.

It can be argued that these provide a good parameter by which to look at involvement. However, one issue that I believe is missing here is the emotional bond between the child and the father and the showing of affection, which as just mentioned can be seen as one of the biggest changes in contemporary conceptualisations of fatherhood.

2.4.3 Absent fatherhood

The decline of what has been viewed as the traditional nuclear family, composed of a married heterosexual couple with a male breadwinner head of the household, is central to contemporary anxieties surrounding family debates amongst academics, politicians and the media (Lewis and Warin, 2001). These debates surrounding the decline of the nuclear family are fed by the decrease of marriage as well as by the increase of cohabiting families which doubled between 1996 and 2012, going from 1.5 million to 2.9 (ONS, 2012) and of single parent households, which increased by 12% between those years (ONS, 2012). Another aspect of the debate is the growing number of children born outside marriage. Between 2006 and 2012 the number of children born to cohabiting couples doubled, from 0.9 million to 1.8 (ONS, 2012). In 2012 47.5% of births in England and Wales were to unmarried parents (ONS, 2013).

It can be argued that one of the concerns with the increase of cohabiting families is based on the reported greater fragility of cohabiting couples compared to married ones (Lewis *et al*, 2002). These concerns, however, are more strongly felt towards cohabiting couples with children as it is estimated that 65% of children of cohabiting unions will experience their parents break-up before they reach 16 years old, as opposed to 30% of children of married couples (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000). Thus, as Lewis and Warin (2001:161) point out,

In large measure, late twentieth century pessimism about the family has been a reaction to the scale and rapidity of the changes in the demographic statistics, which have produced a rethink of divorce and lone motherhood.

Lone motherhood was under severe attack during the 1990s, and during this time “these women were vilified as both a problem and a threat to the traditional nuclear family and to the nation” (Carabine, 2001:271). To an extent, it can be argued that certain contemporary debates surrounding lone motherhood have taken some emphasis away from the ‘lone mother’, and placed it instead on the ‘absent father’. This is not to say that lone mothers are not still at the centre of the debate or that they have been completely disregarded.

The mentioning, or blaming, of absent fathers is not new. Charles Murray’s 1990s underclass critique of lone mothers “is based on the undesirable effects on children and on the community of the absence of fathers” (Murray, 1996:62). In this sense, ‘fatherless families’ is not a complete new approach, but one that was being revived in the socio-political arena of the years between 2000 and 2010. For example, at the time when this research was conducted, the Conservative Party appeared to be placing more and more emphasis on the fatherless family, and the negative impact that this may have on both children and the wider society. For example, back in 2006, the Conservative Party’s Social Policy Justice Group report *The state of the nation. Fractured families* argued that “family life in Britain is changing such that adults and children today are increasingly faced with the challenges of dysfunctional, fractured, or fatherless families” (Centre for Social Justice, 2006:10, my italics). The consequences of growing up without a father have shaped the way that policy makers and researchers approach the issues of fathers and families (Marsiglio *et al*, 2000). Moreover, some politicians, commentators and researchers place young people’s involvement in crime on the absence of fathers in young men’s lives (www.conservatives.com; Murray, 1996). However, research has shown that while father absence can have a negative impact on young men’s lives, this is often mediated by disadvantage rather than family form *per se* (Harper and McLanahan, 2004; East *et al*, 2006).

Central to the debates about single motherhood and absent fatherhood is ethnicity. Using data from the Labour Force Survey, Platt (2009) found that Black and Black British fathers were two times as likely to be non resident as white British fathers, and three times as likely as British Asian fathers. She also found high rates of non-residency amongst families of mixed heritage. The issue with non-residential black fatherhood is that it is often seen as a synonym of absent fatherhood. However, it is argued that “visitation fatherhood has been long tolerated in Black communities” (Fatherhood Institute, 2010), questioning the idea that a non-resident father is always an absent or uninvolved one.

One important aspect for young fathers of Black African and Caribbean backgrounds is their greater likelihood to have grown up in a single mother household (Platt, 2009). The paradox with young fathers is that in the debate surrounding ‘absent fathers’, many of them would fit into it as both ‘victims’ of fatherless families as well as current or future ‘perpetrators’ of creating such a family type. This is discussed in greater detail in the next and final section which is dedicated to young fatherhood.

2.5 Young fatherhood

Quinton *et al* (2002) explain that the transition to fatherhood amongst young men ought to be conceptualized as a process rather than an event. This process, it can be argued, starts with the news of the conception, and continues during the pregnancy, culminating in the moment of birth (particularly for those fathers who are present), and develops over the coming months and even the early years of the children’s lives. This last section of the literature review explores the experience of young fatherhood, with a focus on deterrents to involvement. The section finishes with a review of the role of the provider amongst young men.

2.5.1 Young men: deterrents to involvement

Research has found that despite the initial shock or negativity about becoming a father, most young men express positive feelings about fatherhood and a willingness to be involved in their children’s lives (Quinton *et al*, 2002; Tyrer *et al*, 2005; Speak *et al*, 1997; Reeves, 2006; Wilkes *et al*, 2011). For example, the classic study by Speak *et al* (1997) found that many young non-resident fathers, when questioned about what they saw their fathering roles to be responded ‘being there’, as did young fathers who had planned the birth of their child (Cater and Coleman, 2006). Such expression was widely used by older men in a study concerned with the transition to fatherhood when they were asked what a ‘good father’ consisted of (Barclay and Lupton, 1999). It was also found that the older fathers in the study wanted to participate more in their children’s upbringing than their fathers had. The expression ‘being there’, therefore, may be taken as young fathers’ desire to play a role in their children’s lives.

However, the difficulties in establishing and maintaining contact may be numerous and may eventually force the young men to give up. Indeed, young fathers may encounter many practical barriers to fulfilling their desire to be good parents. For example, the Speak *et al* (1997) found that issues such as unemployment and the lack of an independent home hinder the father-child relationship. This study pointed out that the quality of the relationships with the mother of the child as well as with both sets of grandparents, particularly the maternal grandmother, is vital for making initial contact and maintaining a relationship with the child (Speak *et al*, 1997). If these difficulties remain, it could be expected to result in the young father's withdrawal from the child's life. Such an outcome would fit with stereotypical images associated with young fathers, who are seen as detached and not involved (Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014; Hudson and Ineichen, 1991). This could mean that young fathers may be simultaneously living the supposed consequences of growing up without a father (Tyrer *et al*, 2005), while at the same time creating fatherless families themselves.

Indeed, the disadvantaged backgrounds of most young fathers (Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014; Kiernan, 1995; SEU, 1999) are part of debates surrounding youth culture and the social panics it creates. And part of this disadvantaged background is the experience of growing up in single-parent households. Research studies from the UK show that young fathers are less likely to have lived with both natural parents (Kiernan, 1995; Quinton *et al*, 2002) or to not have had a stable father figure throughout their childhood (Tan and Quinlivan, 2006). As mentioned earlier, young fathers of Black descent are even more likely to have grown up without a resident father (Platt, 2009). This means they are more likely to have suffered the potential negative consequences that growing up without a father can reportedly have. And, despite the aforementioned lack of statistical data showing exactly how many young fathers maintain contact with their children (Sherriff, 2007), qualitative studies suggest that young dads face particular difficulties in keeping relationships with their sons and daughters (Speak *et al*, 1997; Bunting and McAuley, 2004; Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014).

In recent years, small-scale qualitative studies are challenging common perceptions of the effect of parenting amongst young men who have grown up without a father. Young fathers in UK studies have expressed their desire to be a better father than their own fathers were, often based on the idea of absent parenting (Reeves, 2006; Cater and Coleman, 2006; Speak *et al*, 1997). This may suggest that the lack of a father figure in childhood may sometimes have a positive effect. For example, a study of young fathers with an experience of care found that they wanted to fulfill their role because their father was not there for them. The young dads perceived fatherhood as "an opportunity to create new attachments and recreate elements of a biological family" (Tyrer *et al*, 2005:1112) which they did not have with their own families. An Australian study revealed that young men impending fatherhood made them reflect on the fathering they received and made them determined to provide their children

with better quality parenting (Wilkes *et al*, 2011). Research in the UK has shown that father absence when growing up was given as a reason by which young men had planned to have a child (Cater and Coleman, 2006). These findings echo American research based on African-American young fathers, who expressed a willingness to be involved in their children's lives based on the lack of involvement of their own fathers (Bunting and McAuley, 2004). However, it is argued that young fathers often find themselves ill-equipped due to the absence of guidance and role models in their lives (Tyrrer *et al*, 2005; Wilkes *et al*, 2011).

An added potential difficulty is the relationship with the mother of the child. Indeed, the romantic, or otherwise, relationship between the young father and mother can be deemed central to the experience of young fatherhood (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011). However, despite the fact that many of the children born to teenage and young couples do so in the context of a relationship, little is known about their co-parenting experiences (Varga and Gee, 2010). Research from the US suggest there may be a specific influence deriving from ethnic background when it comes to the co-parenting relationship of young couples. Indeed, it is argued by Varga and Gee (2010:31) that generally there exists a "spill-over effect" when problems in the co-parenting relationship impact on the couple relationship, leading to hostility and dissatisfactions amongst partners. They further argue that adolescents from ethnic minority backgrounds may be at greater risk for this "spill-over" effect. In their view ethnic background is an added factor affecting coparenting amongst the young population, and "given that diminished financial resources are associated with lower co-parenting relationship quality...low-income minority adolescent parents may be at particular risk for a negative coparenting relationship" (Varga and Gee 2010:32). They conclude that more research needs to be conducted into this particular population.

Providing accommodation is one of the most popular ways in which families offer support to teenage mothers. Remaining in the family home is a popular initial choice, particularly for younger mothers (SEU, 1999). However, not all young mothers are given that type of family support. For this reason, one of the concerns expressed in the Social Exclusion Unit's 1999 review on teenage pregnancy was the placement of teenage mothers aged under 18 in a lone tenancy. This was to be stopped by providing other options, mainly "supervised semi-independent housing with support" (SEU, 1999:10). Mediating with the young mother's family to explore the option of allowing the under-18 mother to stay in the family home was also seen as a possible resource (SEU, 1999). The 1999 report found that teenage mothers were often housed in accommodation of a poor standard, often in areas of socio-economic need, which could compound any pre-existing disadvantage. Moreover, it was found that being rehoused could lead to isolation from existing sources of support, family and peers (SEU, 1999). Housing remained an issue of concern (SET, 2006) and increasingly local authorities and housing associations employed what they called 'floating support' to work

with young parents in their own homes. The SEU believed that all teenage parents who do not live with their parents should have such support, as being isolated from potential sources of support adds to the risk of exclusion (SET, 2006).

For young fathers, and specifically non-resident ones, one of the barriers faced is the difficulty in setting up a home for their child, often having to live with their own parents or other family members. For example, when they are placed in a neighbourhood away from their child, they may struggle to raise the money for transport to pay visits, placing another hurdle to maintaining contact. Moreover, as in the case of young mothers, this may mean that those young fathers lose their previous support networks (Speak *et al*, 1997). Nevertheless, Fagan *et al* (2007:18) argue that they “found no significant relationship between father’s residence with the infant and care-giving involvement”. This adds to other research, for example that of Cabrera *et al* (2004), that suggests that when it comes to certain groups, such as young fathers, residential status may be less influential on father involvement than other variables.

The residency status of the mother seems to have an impact on young fathers’ commitment to raising their children. There are no data that indicate how many young fathers continue to be involved with their children when they are not cohabiting with the mothers and baby (Quinton *et al*, 2002). However, in Quinton’s study, one strong predictor of a father’s lack of involvement was the baby’s mother place of residency during pregnancy. This study which focused on the predictors of young fathers’ commitment to their baby found that if the mother lived at her family home, the young fathers were less likely to be involved in the follow-up interviews (Quinton *et al*, 2002). Moreover, in general, young fathers who do not reside with the baby’s mother have been found to be more likely to be unemployed, suffer mental health problems and engage in crime and substance abuse than resident fathers (Fatherhood Institute, 2013).

Research suggests that young fathers not only need help with housing and employment. They may require emotional support to deal with issues they may have with partners and family as well as help with coping in the transition to parenthood (Lane and Clay, 2000). However, it is argued that there is a “lack of a coherent theoretical framework that provides a bridge from theories about fatherhood to the reality of practice with men and their children” (Taylor and Daniel, 2000:12). Thus, in the case of young fathers there seems to be no fit between the ‘spoken desire’ and the actual ‘lived reality’ in many of young men’s experiences of parenting (Tyrer *et al*, 2005).

2.5.2 Young fathers' roles: providing and caring

As explored earlier in this chapter, contemporary discourses about fatherhood continue to be based on the dichotomy between caring and providing. When it comes to young fatherhood, it is important to highlight that for men who become fathers at a young age, both roles may be difficult to fulfill. In the case of young fathers, this could be related to two factors. First, in relation to economic provision, research has found that young fathers are likely to have few educational qualifications, and, thus, poorer employability (Kiernan, 1995; SEU, 1999). Consequently, being the sole economic provider in a family may be a difficult role to perform by young fathers as they “may have fewer social and economic resources available for their children or for the mother of their children” (Sigle-Rushton, 2005:1).

In general terms, it can be argued that changes in the labour market have negatively affected young, working-class men's transition to employment and adulthood (Nayak, 2006), and therefore their ability to fulfill the breadwinning role attached to fatherhood, regardless of age. The importance of traditional working-class, industrial employment is that it has accrued its own type of ‘body capital’, forged through notions of the patriarchal ‘breadwinner’, physical ‘hardness’ and a strict sexual division of labour that split the public ‘masculine’ world of work from the private domestic realm of women's unpaid labour (Nayak, 2006:814).

It may therefore be that the situation for some young fathers resembles that of some older working-class fathers, for whom the role of the breadwinner may be at odds with their financial situation and employment prospects. Moreover, when it comes to black fathers it is argued that they “have a greater chance of being unemployed... which might go some way in explaining some of the cases of the absenteeism of black fathers” (Crevalle, 2011:10). It is argued by Vargas and Gee (2010) that this particularly applies to non-resident fathers. Their research suggests that there is a link between unemployment and absenteeism. Unemployment, they explain, may bring economic challenges which can further exacerbate the difficulties that black fathers have accessing their children (Vargas and Gee, 2010). Franklin (2010) argues that being unemployed is a major risk for black men, as it may hinder their self-worth as fathers. Thus, it can be argued that for young fathers of African and Caribbean descent a number of factors affect their experience of fatherhood. In addition to being young and coming from a lower socio-economic background there is the added factor of their ethnic background, which has a particular impact in their experience of fatherhood.

Despite this situation, young fathers are not exempt from social expectations regarding breadwinning practices as culturally there is still the belief that a father should provide for his child, regardless of his age (Gavin *et al*, 2002). It seems that cultural and normative expectations permeate young men's attitudes and beliefs towards fathers' responsibilities.

Research suggest that the role of the economic provider may be regarded as important by young fathers themselves, and that it can play an important role in determining father-child contact. As Bunting and McAuley (2004:299) argue: “the role of the financial provider may be crucial to teenage father’s perceptions of fatherhood and that lack of money may lead to disinterest and uninvolved in other aspects of fatherhood”. Indeed, recent findings suggest that young fathers who are able to financially provide for their children are also more likely to be involved (Fagan *et al*, 2007), pointing at the connection between work and father involvement. Lack of employment and financial pressures are therefore one of the main issues that young fathers have to deal with (Bunting and McAuley, 2004). However, lack of employment may offer the opportunity to contribute in other, non-material, ways. For example, research on African and Caribbean black fathers found that “the capacity of the Black father to adapt to other supportive family roles when not employed is important” (Franklin, 2010:123). For this reason, when it comes to young fathers the same can be applied and their unemployed status could at times be seen as being a potential time resource rather than a hindrance on their role.

The importance of employment in young fathers’ involvement may be related to the influence it exerts on the mother’s view about the father and on her ‘gatekeeper’ role. It is not clear, however, whether young mothers place as much importance on fathers’ employment and income as with previous generations. While it is suggested that employment is seen by young mothers as making the young man a ‘better’ father (Fagan *et al*, 2007); a small-scale study based in Northern Ireland found that mothers put more emphasis on fathers’ help with daily caring tasks than with economic provision (Bunting and McAuley, 2004).

Those that take the stand that sees young parenthood as a fast track to adulthood argue that young men are often unprepared to assume or tackle the responsibilities that fatherhood brings (Fagan *et al*, 2007). Moreover, Quinlivan and Condon (2005:928) explain that young dads have been found to be more idealistic than mothers, and to underestimate the negative consequences of bearing a child and overestimate the positive ones which often means that when faced “with the reality of an actual pregnancy, disillusion may emerge, which may contribute to depression and anxiety”. This in turn, can provoke or contribute to the disengagement and distancing of young fathers from their children.

A study conducted with young men who had planned the birth of their children suggested that the men’s main worry was not necessarily their inability to provide economically for their children, but not ‘being there’ for them. The authors explain that this may be “because they themselves were not used to having lots of material things. However, they were used to a lack of love and more specifically, the lack of a father” (Cater and Coleman, 2006:50). Overall, it can be argued that there are no conclusive findings with regards to the influence of economic provision in relation to young fatherhood involvement.

When it comes to residency, it is argued that it is partly due to the diversity of family structures, that the role of fathers is not as straightforward as it once was (Featherstone, 2003). Indeed, as Marsiglio *et al* (2000:1175) point out,

the growing diversity of life course and residency patterns of men and children today...need to be recognised when conceptualizations of paternal involvement are broadened.

This may be particularly true of young fathers, who are less likely to live with the mother of their child (Pears *et al*, 2005), but who, as evolving research suggests, may nevertheless be involved in some way. There is little statistical information on single, non-married young fathers, and about how many maintain a relationship with their children (Speak *et al*, 1997; Sherriff, 2007). However, it is argued that one of the reasons why there is a growing interest in teenage fathers is that there is evidence that as time passes the contact as well as the time spent with their children is more likely to decrease (Quinton *et al*, 2002). Marriage seems to be a crucial factor, with Fagan *et al* (2007:2) suggesting that “never married adolescent fathers are even less likely than older divorced or separated fathers to spend time with their children”.

2.6 Conclusion

The first aim of this chapter has been to explore the issue of teenage pregnancy as a social problem. It has focused on the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy which was established in 1999, and was still in place when this research was carried out. The strategy, and the report on which it was based, has had a central role in setting the tone for the way that teenage pregnancy has been conceptualized in England. In relation to young fathers, the chapter explained that their support needs were largely ignored, and that the main focus was on the need to ensure they fulfilled the economic provider role. This chapter has questioned the reasons given for the problematisation of teenage pregnancy, such as high rates of teenage pregnancy. It has highlighted that moral and class-held values may play a big, yet uncovered, role in this negative conceptualisation of the issue. Finally, the chapter has briefly explained the centrality of social exclusion in explaining teenage pregnancy. Debates have been polarized into either youthful pregnancy as a result of social exclusion, or as a cause of it. I would argue that this emphasis on social exclusion is one of the reasons why there is often a focus on young fathers’ deficits rather than on their potential.

Secondly, the chapter has covered the literature on fatherhood generally, with the aim to highlight the parameters against which young fathers are measured. It has shown the changes in fatherhood practices and expectations and also showed that the traditional breadwinner role

is still relevant to contemporary fatherhood. The complexity and intricacies of the fathering role were brought to the fore. This exploration is important because it serves as a lens to help view young fathers with a greater emphasis on the *father* rather than on *young*. This is one of the reasons why this thesis incorporates social capital theories as part of the theoretical framework. By doing so there is the opportunity to focus on young men's contributions rather than on their shortcomings.

Thirdly, the section on young fatherhood has explored how young fathers face a number of problems, which may put at risk the father-child relationship and its sustained contact. Some of these difficulties relate to their difficulty in fulfilling their provider role, both in economic and housing terms. This coupled with the greater fragility of the romantic relationship means that the experience of young fatherhood can sometimes be challenging. It can be argued that while it is important to research the difficulties that young fathers experience (Hirst *et al*, 2006), researching their positive contributions may be equally relevant. Moreover, negative, images of young parenthood exist, which may help reinforce views of young fathers as reckless or uninterested. This in turn may be internalised and discourage them from being involved fathers. It is for this reason that discourse theory, as discussed in the next chapter, forms part of the theoretical framework of this thesis. It is believed that certain discourses have an impact on the lived reality of young fathers.

Finally, what seems important to point out in relation to teenage pregnancy is that “absent from virtually all current policy pronouncement is any notion of personal agency” (Holgate *et al*, 2006:4). Such argument is central to this thesis, which employs structuration theory to explore the degree to which young fathers can exercise their agency, understood as their power to act, in their lives. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework, which incorporates structuration theory, discourse and social capital. The chapter explains the usefulness of these three theories in exploring how young men narrate their experience of fatherhood.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and conceptual framework

This chapter offers an exploration of the theoretical perspectives that have informed and guided my research. The aim is to provide the theoretical and conceptual influences and underpinnings to the data analysis, so that the subsequent chapters can be read within a theoretical framework. Building this framework proved to be one of the hardest parts of the study and it involved many dips into a variety of theoretical perspectives. As Maxwell (2005:35) explains,

the conceptual framework for your research study is something that is constructed, not found. It incorporate pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere but the structure, the overall coherence is something that you build, not something that exists, ready made.

The theoretical framework for this research incorporates structuration, discourse and social capital theory. Although these may seem contradictory approaches, with for example discourse theory traditionally disregarding the agency of the subject and structuration giving the individual an active role in the creation of social structure, each adds to the overall investigation. Structuration theory helps shed light on one issue that is central to this thesis: how much power do young fathers have and how much control they can exercise over their lives. As argued in the literature review, one aspect of the views on young fatherhood is that they are polarized. Typically, young fathers are seen either as free agents making decisions, with no regard to socio structural constraints or as victims of their background, curtailing their power to chose and decide. Discourse theory is useful when investigating the manner in which certain conceptualisations of young fatherhood, and teenage pregnancy, may impact on the role that young fathers describe taking. Given all the negative discourses around the issue of youthful pregnancy, it was deemed important to acknowledge their potential impact on young men's lives. Finally, social capital is used to explore one specific aspect of young fatherhood: access to non-material resources and young fathers' non-economic contributions to their children's lives. Social capital is also useful in shedding light into how young fathers spoke about their background and their desire to better their lives and those of their children.

This chapter explains the rationale for using these theoretical approaches, as well as how they complement each other. Their application in my research into the experience of fatherhood and fathering amongst young men from ethnic minority backgrounds will also become apparent as the data analysis unfolds in chapters five to eight.

The first part of this chapter offers a summary of the three theoretical approaches used in this thesis and provides a short explanation for why they are appropriate to study young fathers' perceptions of their roles. Section two moves on to explore structuration theory as developed by Giddens (1984) with a discussion of some of his key concepts. Section three covers discourse theory, with a focus on discussing the idea of discourses as linked to power and knowledge. Section four is dedicated to social capital and it first offers an overview of the concept. It then presents the ideas of two of its main theorists, the French thinker Bourdieu and the American sociologist Coleman. Key ideas from these theorists are explored in relation to social inequality and youth.

3.1 Structuration, Discourse and Social Capital in this study

This is a sociological study, and as such it draws on one of the fundamental, and founding, aspects of the discipline: the extent to which individuals' behaviours and actions are influenced by social factors, which are known as social structures, and how individuals in turn have the power to affect those structures, known as agency. Traditionally, there have been two camps: individualism and objectivism. On the one hand individualism puts emphasis on the role of the individual as the creator of society. On the other hand, those who favour objectivism disregard the subject and believe in the autonomy of structures. However, most contemporary thinkers reject this either-or position and have attempted to explain social phenomena by building theories that incorporate both the role of social structure and individuals in shaping each other and society (Parker, 2000). Since the beginnings of the discipline disagreements exist over what structure really is and how it influences individuals with the classical thinkers engaging in such debates (Elder-Vass, 2010:1). Thus this thesis is partly concerned with what is commonly termed as the dialectic relationship between structure and agency. Central to this thesis is also the idea of power, understood as an individual's ability to act (Giddens, 1984).

One of the theoretical frameworks that have attempted to reconcile the roles of agency and structure is structuration, with its main proponent being the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984). Giddens' theory of structuration is the focus of this first section of the chapter. Giddens attempts to go beyond the dualism approach to structure and agency, where one has primacy over the other, to a duality, where both agency and structure are two sides of the same coin. In drawing the concept of duality of structure, Giddens tries to show "the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices" (Giddens, 1979:5). Moreover, as Ogden and Rose (2005:22) argue "structuration theory has the capability of facilitating a rich, multifaceted analysis... at both macro and micro levels". This was particularly important for this thesis, as it is concerned both with the intimate relationships that young fathers have with their children, and the structural and discursive influences on their understandings of the role of the father. Therefore, the macro sphere, what could be

considered the greater societal forces, is explored to see how they affect the micro-sphere, that is, the role that young fathers adopt on an everyday basis. In turn, this thesis also investigates how the micro-sphere, the day-to-day lives of individuals, can affect the structure.

However, one of the issues with structuration theory is that it does not make explicit mention of the role that culture plays in shaping the individual. For this reason the concept of discourse is integrated in the theoretical framework of this study, and this is explored in section 2. In this framework, discourses are taken as being part of the structure, part of the aforementioned greater societal forces, and as having the power to affect the behavior of individuals. The work of Foucault (1972, 2002) is touched upon in order to illustrate such a process. Thus, the thesis is partly concerned with the way in which young fathers take up certain discourses, for example fatherhood as breadwinning, and how these discourses in turn affect young fathers' perceptions of their parenting role. Moreover, it aims to see how young fathers may help re-define certain discourses, particularly by resisting conforming to the negative views on young fatherhood. In this sense, central to the thesis is the idea of power, which both Giddens and Foucault understand as "a systemic and constitutive element characteristic of a society" (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:9). Here we return to the interplay between the individual and society to understand how one has the power to affect the other.

Another important issue with young fatherhood and teenage pregnancy generally, is that it is often embedded in social exclusion and underclass debates. Social exclusion became a popular concept in the late 90s in Britain in the sphere of politics, policy making and journalism as a way "to describe the problems of particular places and the people who live in them" with the concept being "used to describe quite diverse social groups and social problems" (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005:14). Definitions of social exclusion are diverse and the term is a "contested" one (Hills *et al*, 2002:1), and it is considered one difficult to define (Webster *et al*, 2004). In relation to the UK, the New Labour government which was in power when the research was undertaken defined Social Exclusion as

what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown (SEU, 2001:10).

Teenage Pregnancy was part of their remit to tackle of social exclusion and it was seen as both a consequence and cause of it (SEU, 1999). Taking the SEU definition as the one dominating the Teenage pregnancy views, as the interviews unfolded, I realised that another lens was necessary to investigate the experiences of the young men in this research. Indeed, despite framing their childhood in what would typically be considered social excluded

areas and families, these young men also spoke of education, of moving away from certain environments and of taking action to achieve those things. Thus theories of social capital were used, as there has been a growing interest in the potential benefits of non-monetary resources and how social capital is transmitted through generations, to the benefit of children (Henderson *et al*, 2007). Given the aforementioned socially excluded background of many young fathers, their social capital is worth investigating as another angle by which to explore their contribution to their children's lives.

In this sense, the interplay between structure and agency, the basis of structuration can be explored. Indeed, by looking at the environments, both physical and relational (in the form of social capital), as well as the social climate (in the form of discourses), we can investigate not only how young fathers are affected by social structures, but also how they maneuver around them and challenge them.

3.2 Structuration theory: duality versus dualism of structure

The concept of social structure is essential to the social sciences generally and the study of society particularly. However, despite this centrality there are many perspectives and little consensus on what constitutes social structure, its definition and how it comes into being (Jones, 2003; Elder-Vass, 2010; Lopez and Scott, 2000). Lopez and Scott (2000:3) offer a simple and general definition and explain that “ ‘social structure’ and its associated terms have most typically been used as ways of describing the organization of social life”. Elder-Vass (2010:1) provides another definition of the concept explaining that “the social factors that are held to influence our behaviour are known as social structure” It can be argued that is how such organization of social life actually happens and how (if at all) social structure influence our behaviour that makes it a contested term. This in turn relates to the aforementioned challenge of structure and agency, of the interplay between the individual and society. As was explained in the introduction of this chapter, there have traditionally been two approaches that have attempted answer the question of social structure: individualism and objectivism. Each respectively puts differing emphasis on the role of the individual or social factors in the creation of social structures. It was also mentioned that contemporary theories have emerged to marry the role of social structure and individuals in the constitution of society, where none has primacy over the other. One of these theories is structuration theory, the other is post-structuration (Parker, 2000).

Parker (2000) explains that the concept of structuration is used in two related ways. One way refers to the investigation of the processes by which structures are created. As such, the term can be used for any discipline, be it from the natural or the social sciences. The importance here is that whichever field it is applied in, structuration theory always refers

to a “structure producing process” (Parker, 2000:6). In the social sciences, these processes are seen as historical ones, for structures are ingrained in a particular historical time and context and are the direct result of those. The second way is specific to the social sciences and refers to the actual structuration of social structures, or in other words, the actual make-up of the structures of social reality² (Parker, 2000). In this sense, it is not the process by which structures come into being but rather the nature of structures themselves that are the object of investigation or theorisation. In the social sciences a big part of the debate around social structures is how much agency (if any) do humans have to alter the conditions of their existence, which are the social structures they live in, and the extent to which they are influenced by those structures (Morrisson, 2005:312).

In structuration theory, social reality is made of structures that have been historically produced, as seen in the first use of the term. However, structures are inhabited by humans, whose lives are (potentially at least) in turn affected by those same structures they inhabit. Thus,

when we explain the structuration of social structures we have to consider the relations between these two different kinds of material: the social-structural and the human (Parker, 2000:7).

In Giddens’ structuration theory, structure exists only virtually and as he explains “structures exist paradigmatically, as an absent set of differences, temporally present only in their instantiation” (Giddens, 1979). Structure is seen as rules and resources that exist only as “memory traces” and which are “recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, 1984:377). Thus it is only through people’s use of the structures’ rules and resources that social structures come into being and exist. What this entails is that structuration views social structures as partly residing in the individual. This is ontologically different from post-structuration views. Post-structuration agrees that without individuals there is no structure, but it keeps them separate in order to be able to offer an analysis of how they influence each other (Archer, 2010). The next section will deal with the issue of the interplay between agency and structure in Giddens’ work and the criticisms coming from a post-structuralist perspective, particularly in the work of Margaret Archer.

3.2.1 The recursive nature of social life

Giddens’ (1984) approach to structuration is based upon the dialectical and recursive relationship between an individual’s agency and the social structure within society. Agency is seen not as people’s intention to act, but rather in their capability and power to do so (more

² This is the approach adopted by Giddens.

on this later). Giddens' aim was to transcend the approaches of objectivism and subjectivism (individualism). Objectivism focuses on society as a whole and shows a disregard for its individual parts. Therefore, its focus is on structures rather than actions. On the other hand subjectivism just mainly takes into account individual subjectivity as creating social structures. As Parker (2000:54) explains,

Giddens seeks the sources of relatively enduring regularities of social systems and institutions in social interaction, which is at the same time both historically conditioned and historically productive. Centering on interaction subverts the nineteenth century opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, neither of which is adequate on its own.

In Giddens' particular theory of structuration he suggests that what constitutes social life are individual actions at the micro-social level. In fact Giddens (1984:282) states that "the study of day-to-day life is integral to the analysis of the reproduction of institutionalized practices". However, this does not mean that social life is simply the collective sum of all the small parts (Giddens, 1984). According to structuration theory, the focus of study of the social sciences is not the experiences of the individual, not society as a whole but rather "social practices ordered across space and time" (Giddens, 1984:2). In Giddens' theory, social practices are not considered static but recursive due to their self-reproducing nature. In this sense, actors do not simply create social structures (as in subjectivism), and structures do not exist independently of individuals (as in objectivism). Rather social structures are continually being recreated by humans in a continuous and recursive manner. In order to explain the nature of the structure and agency as inseparable, and metaphorically speaking as two sides of the same coin, Giddens uses the theorem of duality of structure, which is essential to the theory of structuration. In Giddens (1984:23) words,

According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize.

In this sense, Giddens proposed a dialectical and recursive theory to explain the relationship between agency and structure. The duality of structure is based on three concepts, which in Giddens' (1979:62) view are essential to social theory: structure, systems and structuration. As Giddens (1984) explains, structure is the "recursively organized sets of rules and resources" (p.25), which agents draw on and in doing so create the system "the patterning of social relations across time-space, understood as reproduced practices" (p.377). Structuration therefore refers to the conditions and processes by which social systems are produced and reproduced by people's use of rules and resources.

Individuals, referred to as agents by Giddens, routinely draw upon structures (rules and resources) when engaging in social practices and behaviors. By doing so they produce and reproduce the same, or slightly altered social structures from which they draw from. This is how in structuration theory structure comes to be both the medium and outcome of social action: rules and resources only exist in so far as they are being used in interaction (Schrodt *et al*, 2006). In this sense, the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside action, neither they exist materially but in an abstract form, as “memory traces, the organic basis of knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action” (Giddens, 1984:377). It is Giddens’ treatment of structure and agency as inseparable that has drawn criticism.

One of its major critics was Margaret Archer, who has used a post-structuration approach to answer the question of the relationship between structure and agency. Archer (2000:5) explains that the two traditions that Giddens tries to overcome, subjectivisms and objectivism, fall into “conflationary theorising”. Conflationary theorising rejects “the stratified nature of social reality by denying that independent properties and powers pertain to both the ‘parts’ of society and to the ‘people’ within it” (Archer, 2000:5). In this sense, by giving all the power to the people in shaping social structure subjectivism does upward conflation. On the contrary, objectivism does downward conflation by doing the opposite as subjectivism. Archer further argues that when Giddens tries to overcome these two traditions’ views of structure and agency, and creates the duality of structure to do so, he is too falling into conflationary theorising. Indeed, one of Archer’s main objections to structuration was the aforementioned Giddens’s conception of structure and agency as inseparable, which she refers to as “central conflation” (Archer, 2000:6). Thus Archer treated structure and agency as separate, but interrelated, and conceptualises it as a dualism not a duality. As King (2010:245) explains,

one of the principles of this approach is the distinctive properties of social structure and human agency have distinctive purposes. Indeed, Archer wants to develop the distinction between the two in order to explore their interaction.

One of the problems that Archer sees with structuration is its treatment of structure as a virtual order of rules and resources (Giddens, 1979) that only exist as long as they are being used by individual actors. According to Archer (2010:227) what this entails is that “structuration itself is ever a process and never a product”, making it impossible to analyse structure *per se* and identify its properties. This is why Archer (2010:228) followed a morphogenic approach. In Archer’s own words “ ‘morphogenesis’ is also a process, referring to the complex interchanges that produce change in a system’s given form, structure or state...but it has an end-product, structural elaboration”. While Archer does not deny that for structures to exist they need the agency of individuals, the resulting structure “cannot be reduced to practice alone, although these are what generated both it and them” (Archer, 2010:228). Despite

criticisms of structuration, King (2010) argues that Archer and Giddens' approaches are not too dissimilar and defends Giddens' contribution to advancing the problem of agency and structure in the social sciences.

The next section explores the concept of knowledgeable, an essential feature of structuration theory.

3.2.2 The knowledgeable of human agents

According to Giddens, one of the necessary features for the conception of social reality as based around the duality of structure and agency is that "all social agents are knowledgeable about the social systems which they constitute and reproduce in their action" (Giddens, 1979:5). In this sense, for structure to be medium and outcome of action, those implicated in action have to have knowledge about the rules and resources from which they draw from, and which they in turn reproduce, or change. This knowledgeable is essential in Giddens' aim to transcend the "objectivist derogation of the lay actor" (King, 2000:365). There are three levels of mental activity or capacity that Giddens relate to this knowledgeable: the unconscious, practical consciousness and discursive consciousness.

Practical consciousness is defined as "tacit knowledge that is skillfully applied in the enactment of courses of conduct, but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively" (Giddens, 1979:57). However, King (2000:365) argues that rather than seeing practical consciousness as tacit knowledge it would more appropriate to conceptualise it as "unacknowledged understanding" or "what is taken for granted". In this sense, practical consciousness is the knowledge that people have in order to function accordingly with the society or community where they have been socialised. In some sense, it could be seen as the rules and resources which are internalised and used in everyday life and which go unquestioned. This type of knowledge stemming from practical consciousness produces routines and therefore the aforementioned recursive nature of social reality. Routines, and the concept of routinization, are essential to structuration theory. As Giddens (1984:282) explains,

Routine, psychologically linked to the minimizing of unconscious sources of anxiety, is the predominant form of day-to-day social activity. Most daily practices are not directly motivated. Routinized practices are the prime expression of the duality of structure in respect of the continuity of social life. In the enactment of routines agents sustain a sense of ontological security.

Ontological security, another key concept of structuration, is essential to the daily functioning

of individuals and refers to the sense of “trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be” (Giddens, 1984:375). Ontological security relates to a sense of predictability that humans need to have about the environment in which they live in order to carry out their day-to-day activities and, from a psychological perspective, keep anxiety at bay. It is via their unconscious that they achieve ontological security (O’Donnell, 2000). Moreover, it is also via routines that self-identity is developed. As Ogden and Rose argue (2005:229) “routines not only fulfill fundamental ontological security needs, but they are also the foundation of specific identities experiences by individuals”. However, there may be times when those routines, and thus the sense of ontological security, are disrupted. It is then when individuals become aware of their surroundings and have to make use of their discursive consciousness, which relate to “knowledge which actors are able to express on the level of discourse” (Giddens, 1979:5). It can be argued this is the human capacity to reflect on a given situation and discursively attempt to resolve it or make sense of it.

Thus one essential aspect of this knowledgeability is reflexivity, and particularly what Giddens (1984) calls the ‘reflexive monitoring of action’. This, according to Giddens is a chronic feature of individuals and refers to “the continuous monitoring of action which human beings display and expect others to display” (Giddens, 1984:3). What is important to point out is that not only do individuals monitor their actions and those of others, they also “routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the context in which they move” (Giddens, 1984:5). Moreover, one essential aspect to it is that “such monitoring always has discursive features” (Giddens, 1991:35), which means that at times individuals are able to discursively explain their actions. Interestingly, it can be argued that it is precisely this ability to elaborate discursively on one’s actions which is essential to qualitative interviewing. Indeed, as explained in chapter 4, by interviewing it is assumed that the social world can be investigated by asking people to reflect on their experiences. In this sense, it is expected that people have the ability to reflexively and discursively explain why they do what they do.

Giddens sees all humans as “inherently reflexive at both a subconscious level, constituting practical everyday knowledge, and at a conscious level, enabling social practice to be revised discursively in light of new information” (Hardcastle *et al*, 2005:225). Thus reflexivity works at all three levels of mental activity: the unconscious, the practical and the discursive and informs individuals on how to act in their society. Moreover, this reflexivity means that “individuals are capable of reflecting upon and learning from experience and so of changing things (within the limits of circumstances)” (O’Donnell, 2003:761). In relation to young fathers, the process by which some young fathers come to be present in their children’s lives, and how this may be related to their ability to change things, based on reflecting on previous experiences, is explored in this thesis. For example, their reflection on the experience of growing up without a father makes many young men want to be there for their children.

However, their ability to actually be there is sometimes curtailed by the circumstances, such as problems with the mother of their child (Florsheim *et al*, 1999)

3.2.3 Structuration Theory, Agency and Power

Agency for Giddens is not understood as the intention people have to act, but rather as their “capability of doing those things in the first place” (Giddens, 1984:9). It is for this reason that agency implies power, as “agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently” (Giddens, 1984:9). It can be argued that the most negative views and representations of young fatherhood see them under the light of pure agency: young fathers are solely responsible for their lack of involvement. On the other hand, those giving a more positive view adhere to the structure as constraining view; in which young fathers are, to an extent, stripped of their agency and power to act differently. However, these two positions fall into the structure-agency debates that see them as two separate entities. This, it can be argued, may not be useful in understanding the complex web of motives, circumstances and relationships that affect the experience of young fatherhood.

The concept of power, as understood by Giddens, can be considered useful in viewing young fathers neither as victims of their environment, nor as acting completely autonomously from structural constraints. Giddens (1979, 1984) argues that in the social sciences, conceptions of power mirror those of the dualism of agency and structure. Indeed, power is either seen as being located in the individual, being the intention or will to act, or else it is seen as being in terms of domination and as the property of the community. One of the issues here is that both of these stands view power as a resource in itself, whereas Giddens sees power as medium of action. Indeed, as he explains,

The exercise of power is not a type of act; rather power is instantiated in action, as a regular and routine phenomenon. It is mistaken moreover to treat power itself as a resource...resources are the media through which power is exercised, and structures of domination reproduced (Giddens, 1979:91).

In this sense, for Giddens power is inherent in action as “to be an agent is to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal power” (Giddens, 1984:14). Power is thus not to be understood as a special type of conduct, but as part of all action. In this sense, it can be argued that humans with their actions always have the potential power to be transformative, even unintentionally so. However, this transformative power is at the same time “achieved by access to, and application of, structural properties (the rules and resources), which generate modalities of social control” (Hardcastle *et al*, 2005:224). Giddens relates

power to resources and rules, allocated in the structure, and which agents access and use in their routines and by doing so either transform or recreate those same structures.

In conclusion, according to Giddens (1984), individuals have agency, which is the capability to effect change in social situations and structures, either intentionally or not. Simultaneously, social structures exist (with their rules, belief systems, practices and resources) and they exert influence on the capacity that individuals have to act, both enabling and constraining their actions. Thus, in the instance of this thesis it explores the extent to which young fathers' experiences of fatherhood may be affected by various structural influences, composed by socio-environmental and discursive elements. These may potentially have an effect in shaping their experiences of fatherhood; however the young fathers as agents may contribute to the shaping of the structure.

3.3 Discourse Theory in the creation of social reality

One aspect which structuration theory plays limited attention to is the idea of culture and language in the makeup of social structure and in the interplay between structure and agency. For example, in relation to language Giddens (1984:xvi) briefly acknowledges that its "use is embedded in the concrete activities of day-to-day life and it is in some sense partly constitutive of those activities". However, there is no in-depth treatment of the subject in his work. Structuration theory was deemed suited to try breaking the dichotomy between seeing young fathers either as victims of their background or as acting completely autonomously from structural constraints. However, to me all the different ways in which young fathers were spoken about in academia, in public policy or in the media (which can be regarded the most socially visible), seemed essential. It is for this reason that the concept of discourse is integrated into this thesis as I believe that it is important to the experience of young fatherhood. I would argue that young fathers are both encouraged and constrained by the differing discourses that were spoken about in the literature review. These include new fatherhood, and how young men respond to those ideals, as well as the negative views on young men's role as fathers amongst others.

3.3.1 The power of Discourse: knowledge and truth

There is an array of definitions in the literature that attempt to define discourse (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) but it is not the intention of this thesis to offer an exhaustive review of definitions of the term. Discourse in the social sciences is mostly associated with the work of the French thinker Foucault, who according to Hall (2001:72) "gave it [discourse] a different meaning". Discourse was generally used as a linguistic term, related to the activities of writing and talking, however, Foucault broke the traditional linguistic divide between language and practice (Hall, 2001; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). This break Foucault did in his book "The

Archeology of knowledge” in which he explained,

A task that consists of not - of no longer -treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things (Foucault, 1972:49)

In this sense, as argued by Carabine (2001), the relevance of discourses lay in the fact that they are productive. Indeed, discourses create the object of which they speak about - knowledge - and create a version of it that is presented as real or true. Discourses’ status of ‘truth’ means that they “are also productive in that they have power outcomes or effects” (Carabine, 2001:268). It is the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power, that is essential to Foucault’s work (Carabine, 2001; Hall, 2001), and also a much contested one (Couzens, 1998). In the words of Foucault (2002:131-2),

Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth- that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true... Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it-a “regime” of truth.

When it comes to studying the experiences of young fathers, this particular aspect of Foucault’s notion of discourse can be taken as a useful theoretical tool. Indeed, it can be argued that the idea that some discourses acquire the authority necessary to have truth value (Hacking, 1998:35) can be applied to young fathers, and mothers’ lives.

Thus for example, Duncan *et al* (2010) point out how the media often report on atypical or extreme cases of teenage pregnancy, such as that of a 14 year old boy who got his 12 year old girlfriend pregnant in 1999. This case, it is argued, had a direct effect on policy, and was the base for the aforementioned 1999 Teenage Pregnancy report statement saying that the then existent Child Support Agency would be given a bigger role to ensure that young fathers paid maintenance for their children. An added element is the idea of “truth” as being understood as the power of discourse or knowledge to have an effect on reality. Discourses are understood as being part of the structure, particularly in being part of the rules that individuals live by, and which are mutually shared. As Hall (2001:72) argues, discourses “influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others”. This study partly aims to explore the potential effects of discourses on the young men’s roles as fathers.

Possibly emanating from the idea of the discourse/knowledge and power, one of Foucault's concerns was how, where and when certain discourses came to take centre stage in society (Crossley, 2005; Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1982). So Foucault "never posted a universal theory of discourse, but rather sought to describe the historical forms taken by discursive practices" (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1982). Although, this study will not try to unravel the history of young fatherhood as a social construct, it is the idea of discourse as bound to its context and historical period (Hall, 2001) that attracts me. Indeed, what differentiates discourse theory from other approaches is that "it attempts to provide a more profound interrogation of the precarious status of meaning" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002:6). One of the aspects of Foucault's work is that he seeks to find the differences and discontinuities of discourse (on subjects such as madness and sexuality) through history (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1982; Couzens, 1998), which gives way to viewing discourse as precarious. As Foucault (1972:6) argues,

Beneath the great continuities of thought, beneath the solid, homogeneous manifestations of a single mind or of a collective mentality, beneath the stubborn development of a science striving to exist and to reach completion at the very outset, beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions.

This links with the argument that teenage or young pregnancy has not always been regarded as a problem and it still is not in some countries or in some communities, cultures or ethnic groups within Britain as well as internationally (Bonell 2004; Higginbottom *et al*, 2006; Coin de Carvalho, 2007; Edin and Kefalas, 2005). As a result, it can be said that the notion of young fatherhood is socially constructed and that what is regarded as young fatherhood in one country or culture may not be in another. I am therefore basing this study on the idea that teenage pregnancy and young fatherhood are generally regarded as a social problem in the UK and that they are socially constructed through various discourses. I will critically examine negative assumptions and aim to add to the literature on young fathers that offer a less catastrophic and more positive or neutral view on the issue.

The idea that discourse, based on knowledge that it is applied to regulate the conduct of others (Hall, 2001), can consequently impact on people's lives is one of the interests of this study. It can then be argued that the most relevant aspect of discourse for this thesis is not the root of the discourse on young fatherhood and their development, but rather the effect it can have on people's lives. As Phillips and Hardy (2002:3) argue,

social reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning. As discourse analysts, then, our task is to explore the relationship between discourse and reality.

As argued before, the effects that discourses potentially have on reality are related to the idea of ‘truth’, which is a much debated aspect of discourse in Foucault’s work (Hall, 2001; Hacking, 1998; Couzens, 1998). Thus it is the relationships between discourses and social practices that this study is partly concerned with. One of my aims is to research young fathers’ responses to certain discourses. This is due to the fact that one of the aims of the study is to explore the interaction between discourses and social practices and behaviours, working from the macro to the micro-sphere of young fathers’ lives.

3.3.2 The “illusion of autonomous discourse”

One of the issues in Foucault’s work was that by the 1960s he seemed to leave social practices aside and concentrate instead solely on linguistic practices (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1982; Couzens, 1998). As a result, his work was only concerned with discourse and the way it organises itself as well the means by which it creates social institutions and reality, leading to a

neglect of the ways discursive practices are themselves affected by the social practices in which they and the investigators are imbedded. This is what we call the illusion of autonomous discourse³ (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1982).

This ‘illusion of autonomous discourse’ means that the relationship between discourse and reality is seen as a one way process. However, it can be argued that this is not possible as the subjects of discourse are social and they cannot be mere recipients of discourse. Since they are the ones living and interacting with discourses, being the subjects of it, but also the ones that are the objects of discourse they must, in some way, also create meaning. This relationship is a recurrent theme in Foucault’s work, who “throughout his career investigates both how human beings constitute themselves as subjects and how they treat one another as objects” (Couzens, 1998:4). In this sense, this study is not only concerned with how discourses potentially create a social reality for young fathers, but how young fathers challenge and maneuver around those discourses. It can be argued that this relates to the agency side of structuration theory. By maneuvering around and against the power of discourses to take charge of their lives, young fathers are changing their reality and contributing to a new conceptualisation of young fatherhood.

Since young fatherhood has generally been represented negatively both in media as well as in Government reports, as well as sometimes in the academic literature (SEU 1999; Swan *et al*, 2003), one of the concerns of this study is to see how these negative discourses affect the

³ Foucault did make his linguistic approach to the construction of reality the subject of critical analysis.

way that men view their ability to parent. Also, since they are often negative, it will explore they way in which they possibly limit their relationship. As Hall (2001:72) states,

Just as discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it.

However, as previously discussed, discourses cannot be seen as autonomously creating social reality, without being affected by it. While the above quote is right in some ways, it is not possible to just to believe that subjects are completely moulded and constructed through discourse. Indeed, as Carabine (2001:273) argues “we should think of discourses as constantly being contested and challenged and therefore not necessarily always omnipotent”. This is in accord with the recursive and dialectical relationships between structure and agency of structuration theory and it is here where the two theoretical approaches, structuration and discourse, meet.

The growing body of small-scale, qualitative research about young fatherhood is starting to give out a more positive message about these fathers, in terms of their willingness to take a fathering role (Speak *et al*, 1997; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Reeves, 2006; Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011). This may be seen as a challenge to prevailing negative discourses on young fatherhood particularly amongst the academic community. For this reason, the interaction of what could be called popular negative discourses and personal positive discourses and the way they may encourage or discourage young fathers to feel involved and valued in their parenting role, was explored in the course of the interviews. An added issue is not only how discourses may become real and affect young fathers' lives directly but how discourses may also affect people around them. In turn, the influence of discourses on partners, family members and professionals may affect the way they treat young fathers and ultimately help shape the father-child relationship. This is important as previously argued, research shows the influence of family, partners and ex-partners on the young men's lives on different areas of their lives. Although this was not be explored directly (by interviewing those people), they came up in the course of the interview.

3.4 Social capital

Young fatherhood has often been explored from a Social Exclusion (SE) perspective, as discussed in the literature chapter, with a focus on young parents' deficits and disadvantaged backgrounds (Speak *et al*, 1997; Duncan *et al*, 2010). One aspect of young fatherhood that is

sometimes related to the Social Exclusion perspective is the greater likelihood of young fathers to have grown up in single-mother households (Kiernan, 1995). Indeed, the literature review explored the issue of absent fatherhood and introduced the idea of the much-argued potential negative impact of growing up without a father for young men. This in turn is related to the anxieties surrounding the decline of the nuclear heterosexual family and traditional ways of understanding families. Chambers (2012) argues that governments and the media feed into the moral panics surrounding the decline of the nuclear family and that even though “it is just one of many diverse living arrangements, the nuclear family remains a powerful icon of tradition and stability...still perceived as an antidote to today’s social problems” (Chambers, 2012:2). Social capital is one of the perspectives that has been used to analyse the potential consequences of the change in family forms, and they add to the debates surrounding lone motherhood and absent fathering. As Edwards *et al* (2003:3) argue,

Families are often regarded as a wellspring of social capital generation or destruction. Some commentators centre families, treating them as the main focus of their arguments. Others, however, decentre families: they acknowledge families as a key source of social capital but then shift their focus elsewhere.

There are three main theorists, the so-called theoretical fathers of social capital: Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Edwards *et al* (2003) explain that Bourdieu and Coleman’s theories put family at their centre. Putnam’s acknowledges the importance of family yet bases his arguments around community and civic participation. In a similar manner, Winter (2000:3) explains that the social capital and family have been studied in two ways: either as constructing social capital within the family (Bourdieu and Coleman) or beyond it (Putnam). When it comes to the first view, the focus is on how social capital generation in families, can benefit children. The other view, relates it to how families can aid their members reach out into communities outside the familial grouping⁴. This relates to the argument by Portes (1998:9) that social capital can be divided in three basic functions: “a) as a source of social control, b) as a source of family support and c) as a source of benefits through extra familial networks” . This thesis explores the work of Bourdieu and Coleman, due to their sociological background. Putnam (2000) is political scientist who is mainly concerned with the decline in civil participation and the weakening of social ties and networks amongst people. His work therefore is not as relevant to this thesis. There is however, one concept that Putnam (2000) developed, that of bridging and bonding social capital which is included in this study.

For these reasons my interest in social capital as a conceptual tool grew and was deemed an appropriate concept to incorporate in the theoretical framework. The concept can be used

4 Out of the three theorists Coleman puts family at the center of his social capital theories, and for this reason the discussion on this issue will be based mainly on his ideas.

to explore not only the support networks and resources that young fathers used to better their lives, but also to explore what they could contribute to their children's life that was not economic.

3.4.1 Social capital: an overview

Social capital is a theory and a concept that is increasing being used not only in the social sciences, but in policy settings as well as in the mass media (Field, 2003). The term has too made the leap into everyday language (Portes, 1998). However, despite its raising popularity, and just like other social theoretical concepts, there is no consensus on both its definition, and how to measure it (Furstenberg, 2005; Harper, 2001). This coupled with the fact that "social capital has evolved into something of a cure-all for the maladies affecting society at home and abroad" (Portes, 1998:1) makes it a highly contested term, both in its meaning as well as in its theoretical application. It is argued that the main problems with social capital are "lack of conceptual clarity, issues with causality and measurement, and ignorance as to the "downside" of social capital" (Patulny and Svendsen, 2007:33).

So even though the idea that social connection can be beneficial to the individual may have been part of sociological thinking since its beginnings it is argued that there are two particular features which have made social capital capture the attention of academics and politicians alike (Portes, 1998). First, there is the way in which the positive aspects of sociability are emphasized while the negative ones are ignored, which is sometimes criticised. Secondly, those positive aspects or consequences are placed in the framework of capital, which "calls attention to how such non-monetary forms can be important sources of power and influence, like the size of one's stock holdings or bank account" (Portes, 1998:2). This in turn has caught the interest of policy makers as in some way offers low cost, non-economic solutions to social problems (Edwards, 2004).

Despite the lack of consensus over its meaning and diverse, wide ranging use, the basis of social capital, the belief that connections between people constitute a resource both for individual as well as social life, is widely accepted as valid. The idea that relationships matter (Field, 2003) is thus the core of theories of social capital. As Field (2003:1) explains,

People connect through a series of networks and they tend to share common values with other member of these networks; to the extent that these networks constitute a resource, they can be seen as creating a form of capital.

However, the very usage of the term capital, which places the potential benefits of social

connectedness in the sphere of the economic, has been criticised and questioned. Such criticism is offered by Smith and Kulynich (2002), who believe that to use economic terminology, capital, in relation to social relations has certain ideological and analytical connotations that are not often acknowledged. As they explain “the term impedes understanding because of the historical association of the word capital with economic discourse’ (Smith and Kulynich, 2002:149). These include issues such as the way in which putting the social in the same category as the financial ignores the greater influence that financial power has on political and social participation. Moreover, Smith and Kulynich (2002) believe that because the word capital is rooted in economic discourse, employing the term social capital likens civic and democratic engagement with economic activity. As a result, they propose using the term social capacity in order to bring greater analytical transparency to the subject. However, it is argued that the varied terminology often employed to discuss social capital only adds to confusion over the concept (ONS, 2001). Moreover, as will be explored later, one of the leading theorists of social capital, Pierre Bourdieu, was a firm proponent of using the word capital in the non-financial sphere (Moore, 2008).

Another issue particularly relevant to this thesis is that the so-called theoretical fathers of social capital, Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, viewed “children and young people... as passive recipients of the benefits of parental social capital, rather than active producers and consumers in their own right” (Holland *et al*, 2007:97). For example, in relation to the impact of social capital on young people, Coleman (1990:334) defined it as

the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or a young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital.

However there is now a growing body of research that has addressed the deficit in the literature of young people as just recipients of social capital (Boeck, 2007; Holland *et al*, 2007). When it comes to young fathers and social capital it can be argued that they are in a paradoxical position as they belong to both the youth and the parent population. In this sense, it would appear that their condition of being a young person would negate their agency in creating and using social capital. However, as parents they are expected to generate resources for their children. The problem may lie in that too often young fathers are viewed under the passive recipient young person perspective, as lacking agency to generate resources for their children. In the course of this thesis, it is argued that young people generally, and young fathers specifically, do have the capacity to generate their own social capital.

One way in which young fathers create their own social capital is by shaping their social networks. The work of Putnam becomes relevant here. Central to his conceptualization of the different types of capital is the idea that “social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups” (Putnam, 2000:22). This relates to the distinction that Putnam (2000) makes between two types of capital: bonding (or exclusive) and bridging (or inclusive). These two concepts have been widely used in youth transitions research (Boeck, 2007) and it is one that will also be used in this thesis.

In Putnam’s view “bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves” (Putnam, 2000:23). On the one hand, bridging social capital is based on the types of social relations that link individuals to other social groupings and generate connections. Bonding social capital on the other hand, links individuals to their immediate social networks providing a closer and more limited social network. In this sense, it is argued that bonding social capital serves the purpose of “getting by”, whereas bridging social capital is useful in “getting ahead” (Field, 2003:32).

This thesis has adopted the same concept of social capital as was used by Holland *et al* in their study of youth transitions in the UK. As they explain,

we work with a broad understanding of the concept that encompasses the values that people hold and the resource that they can access. These both result in, and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships. (Holland et al ,2007:98).

In this sense, this thesis is not concerned with measuring social capital as such, or mapping out and tracing the connections that young fathers actually have, and how those impact on their life chances. I try to identify how young fathers use social capital as a “social, material and cultural resource” (Holland *et al*, 2007:99) in relation to their attempts at improving their lives and those of their children. It is here where social capital and structuration theory meet. Indeed as argued by Boeck (2007:3) “notions of structure, agency and choice...are of special importance when considering the social capital of young people”. This is related to the way in which social capital has been explored largely in relation to young people’s transition experiences, for example into education and employment. For this reason, the focus has been on their agency to access and use structural resources, and how these are affected by their position in the social structure as well as intersected by gender and ethnicity (Raffo and Reeves, 2000; Holland *et al*, 2007; Rudd, 1997).

Despite the aforementioned view of the theoretical fathers on young people as passive recipients of social capital, their theoretical perspectives are still of use. In relation to their stands, it is argued that Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, came from different academic backgrounds and diverged in the way they view and use the concept. While Bourdieu, whose writing of social capital was an analysis of social order, was mainly concerned with social inequality and hierarchy, Coleman and Putnam used social capital as a theory to unravel issues of social cohesion (Holland *et al*, 2007). Despite the differences, they all agree on the main components of social capital: it “consists of personal connections and interpersonal interaction, together with the shared sets of values that are associated with these contacts” (Field, 2003:13). The next two sections explore Bourdieu and Coleman in greater depth and offer an explanation of why their theories are useful for studying young fatherhood.

3.4.2 Bourdieu: social inequality

The French thinker Bourdieu was the first sociologist to offer a systematic treatment of social capital in contemporary society (Portes, 1998). Coming from a European tradition, Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of social capital is concerned with explaining social inequality and the transmission of power and privilege, rather than with social cohesion. His aim was to offer an explanation of social hierarchy and the persistence of social classes, using the concept of capital but broadening its scope to include activities outside the economic arena. Bourdieu’s aim was to “extend the sense of the term “capital” by employing it in wider systems of exchanges” (Moore, 2008:102), and show that social inequality cannot be solely based on economic and mercantile exchange.

Bourdieu’s thinking was influenced by Marxist theory as he believed that “inequality was to be explained by the production and reproduction of capital” (Field, 2003:15). However, even though Bourdieu placed great importance on economic capital, saying that it was “at the root of all other types of capital” (Bourdieu, 1986:252), he believed it alone could not explain social inequality and the persistence of class divisions. In Bourdieu’s view, economic theory has falsely imposed on the concept of capital a definition that is restricted to pure economic practice. He thus defends the idea that a science of economics should include other types of capital and exchanges, not just those of pure monetary nature. Thus, Bourdieu attempted to unmask certain social assets and practices that promote social divisions and help keep the social structure. For this reason Bourdieu’s (1986) ideated a theory of social structure that included different types of capital. Initially he considered that there were 3 types: economic, cultural and social, and later he added symbolic capital. Economic capital can be directly converted into money. Its institutionalised form is property rights. Cultural capital exists in

three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state and in the institutionalised state. While the embodied state refers to “dispositions of the mind and body”, the objectified state is “cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.)” and the institutionalised state, which is embodied in “educational qualifications” (Bourdieu, 1986:47). Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986:51) as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition-or in other words, to membership in a group”. Both cultural and social capital can, under certain circumstances, also be converted into money.

The distribution of the types of capital represents, in Bourdieu’s view, the structure of the society. One of Bourdieu’s concern was with the non-monetary capital possessed by the dominant class that helped sustain inequality and how this was actually protected by a theory of economics that only took mercantile exchange as marking class fraction and social relations. What is important for this thesis is that even though Bourdieu used the different types of capital in order to unmask the reproduction of privilege amongst the higher classes, “these terms have increasingly been used to explore the absence of resources in the production and reproduction of inequality” (Holland *et al*, 2007:98). This makes Bourdieu’s work appropriate to apply to the lives of young fathers, who as explained in the literature review, often come from lower socio-economic or deprived backgrounds.

One of the issues that Bourdieu wanted to address in his work is similar to that of Giddens, as he developed the notion of “habitus” in an “effort to escape from structuralist objectivism without relapsing into subjectivism” (Bourdieu, 1994:61). This takes us back to the idea of the interplay between agency and structure, and who has a bigger power in the ordering of social and individual lives. Due to its complexity, habitus has been described as “an enigmatic concept...also one of the most misunderstood, misused and hotly contested of Bourdieu’s ideas” (Maton, 2008:49). It is beyond the remit of this thesis to enter debates around the notion of habitus and this concept will be explored in relation to the work on youth transition of Raffo and Reeves (2000) later in this section. In relation to habitus, Bourdieu (1977:72) says that

the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment...produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’.

Maton (2008:51) explains that Bourdieu thought of the habitus as the property of “social agents”, which could be “individuals, groups or institutions”. Maton (2005) further explains

that the habitus is structured by past and present circumstances, including family upbringing or education. It is also structuring in that it influences one's present and future actions and it is a structure because it is patterned rather than random (Maton, 2008). When Bourdieu developed the notion of habitus he was trying to unravel why is it that the regularities of social practices happen without explicit rules that enforce them.

Thus he does not see the structuring properties of the habitus as "being the product of obedience to rules" (Bourdieu, 1977:72) but rather as "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perceptions, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (Bourdieu,1977:86). In this sense , as Maton (2008:53) explains, Bourdieu makes a differentiation between being subjective but not individual because he believes that "we are each a unique configuration of social forces, but these forces are social, so that even when we are being individual and "different" we do so in socially regular ways". In this sense, it can be argued that this conceptualization of structure and agency gives structural forces a greater role in shaping the individual. Such concept and idea resembles Giddens' concept of practical consciousness, discussed in page 44. Practical consciousness referred to the rules and resources circulating in a given society, which individuals internalise and use in order to function socially.

The concept of habitus is one that Raffo and Reeves (2000) incorporate in the theoretical perspective developed to study youth transitions to education that they call individualized systems of social capital. They describe this system as

a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations, which as the young person at the core of the constellation...such systems of social relations both support and constrain individual actions and outcomes (Raffo and Reeves, 2000:148).

In relation to the habitus, Raffo and Reeves (2000) consider two aspects of the concept that correspond with the young person's individualized system of social capital. First, they agree with the idea that the socio-economic background affects young people's perceptions of their opportunities and experiences. Secondly, the individualized system of social capital shares with habitus the capability of "generating practices and behaviors within the individual which are not regulated or explicitly institutionalized, but which are the product of a collective process of inculcation" (Raffo and Reeves, 2000:150). However, the one aspect that their system of social capital refutes is the aforementioned idea of the habitus that negates the possibility of the individual to mark him or herself out from the group. In Raffo and Reeves's (2000:152) view this implies that individuals cannot have aspirations or go beyond their

“objective reality”. Indeed, their research on young people’s school defies Bourdieu’s idea of the habitus as “predetermining an inescapable destiny” and presents a more “open ended future for young people” (Raffo and Reeves, 2000:151). Such conceptualization is important for this research as it applied to the lives of the young fathers that took part. Indeed, while there were apparent constraints that were linked to their socio-economic background, many of the young fathers managed to make active choices about their present and future. This relates not only to studying, but to their determination to maintain a relationship with their children against a variety of hurdles, such as inability to provide economically.

3.4.3 Coleman: rational action and social capital

One of the big exponents of social capital was the American sociologist James Coleman. Coleman’s theoretical aim was to combine what he saw as the two main ways of looking and explaining social action (Coleman, 1988). The first one, which he described as sociological, sees individual action as regulated by its social context, namely rules, norms and obligations internalized by the actor. The second one, which Coleman related to economics, regards the individual as self-interested and his or her actions as motivated by this self-interest without any influence by the social world it inhabits. Although Coleman sees virtues in both views he also sees defects and believes that both fail to fully capture the functioning of the social world. The sociological view is able to explain action in its social context but does not give the individual a motivation for that action. The view of economics provides an explanation in that the individual has an engine of action, but disregards the social context in which the individual is embedded. Coleman (1988) thus uses social capital, his key theoretical tool, in order to incorporate social structure into his theory. Coleman’s (1988:96) theoretical orientation works in the following way:

It accepts the principle of rational or purposive action and attempts to show how that principle, in conjunction with particular social contexts, can account not only for the actions of individuals in particular contexts but also for the development of social organization.

Social capital is essential in bringing together rational action, self-interest and social context in the work of Coleman. Just like Bourdieu, Coleman also speaks of different types of capitals: physical, human and social. While physical capital is achieved through changes in materials to create tools and human capital is achieved through changes in people to acquire skills and knowledge, social capital is brought “about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action” (Coleman, 1988:100). There are two essential aspects in the quote above. The first aspect is that social capital does not reside in the individual or in ‘physical implements of production’; rather it is located in the social structure, in the relations among people. This, according to Coleman (1990), is what makes social capital different from

other types of capital and much less tangible than physical and human capital. Secondly, and despite its abstract nature, what social capital shares with the aforementioned forms of capital is its ability to be productive and to be used as a resource. In this way Coleman (1988:98) defines social capital as

a variety of entities with two elements in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain action of actors - whether persons or corporate actors - within the structure.

Because social capital is lodged in the relations between people, it is part of the social structure. In this sense, social capital is a resource to be used by individuals, yet they cannot use it alone, but need one another in order to achieve their own ends. This means that there is an engine of action for the individual, but since the means to his or her ends resides in the help of others, social structure comes into the picture.

Coleman (1988) identifies different forms of social capital: obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of structures, information channels and social norms. They are all resources that constitute social capital for the individual as they facilitate action. As social capital is not the property of the individual, but part of the social relations among individuals, it cannot be solely used for self - benefit. This becomes clear in relation to Coleman's conceptualisation of 'obligations and expectations' as a resource. Coleman speaks of "credit slips" to explain the system by which if A does something for B, then this creates an obligation on the part of B and an expectation on A that B will repay. For social capital to function and prevail, both on an individual as well as on a community level, there needs to be a commonality of values, so that people feel good about helping each other. Moreover, for people to benefit from their connections to others there has to be reciprocity in the relationship, which entails a degree of trust (Field, 2003). Information channels on the other hand relate to the idea that social relations are an important source of information that individuals can use in order to take action. Coleman (1990) gives the example of how an academic who wants to keep up with literature in her field can use her daily interactions with colleagues in order to acquire that information. In this sense, unlike the "obligation and expectations" resource, this type of social capital is not valuable for the "credit slips" they produce, but rather for the information they offer.

The last form of social capital identified by Coleman is social norms. Norms act to regulate the conduct of both individuals and collectives, in order to aid the functioning of social life and consequently that of individuals too. One of the norms that he points at as creating

social capital “is the norm that one should forgo self-interest and act in the interest of the collectivity” (Coleman, 1988:104). This, in his view, helps build nations, aids in the functioning of families and encourages people to work for common good. These norms can either be internalised by the individual or can be enforced by external sanctions coming from the community or group. One of the differences of this type of capital compared to the other two, is that not only it ‘facilitate action’, thus enabling individual action, it also acts as a restrictive force.

One of the criticisms of Coleman’s view on social capital is that it is

naively optimistic; as a public good, social capital is almost entirely benign in its function, providing a set of norms and sanctions that allow individuals to cooperate for mutual advantage, and with little or no ‘dark side’ (Field, 2003:28).

As mentioned earlier, this is a common criticism of social capital theories generally. As opposed to Coleman, Bourdieu’s theorizing offers a glimpse of what can be considered a negative social capital. By highlighting class differences in access to resources, based on their social capital, Bourdieu did acknowledge that social capital is not beneficial to everyone, and what is more, it can be restrict and limit the lives of some.

3.4.4 Coleman, social capital in the family

Coleman (1990:579) considers the nuclear family “the basic building block of social structure” and thus it is central to his theory of social capital. In relation to the family, Coleman (1988) believes that family background is often seen as one entity when in fact it can be separated into three components: financial capital (wealth and income that can help achievement), human capital (parents’ education which provides a learning environment) and social capital within the family (relationship between parents and children, and other family members).

In particular, Coleman was interested in seeing how social capital within the family impacted on the education outcomes of children. This was related to parents’ ability to transmit their human capital to their offspring, This, Coleman (1988:111) believes, “depend both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adult to the child”. For Coleman this meant that what was important was not the amount of human capital, for example in terms of academic qualifications, that parents had. The important thing was how much effort parents put in transmitting human capital to their children. Thus Coleman (1988) gives the example of a school authority in the United States that realised that some Asian immigrant families were buying two copies of every book their children needed. Upon

investigation they found out this was so the mothers could study and then help their children do well. He concludes saying that this exemplifies “a case in which the human capital of the parents, at least measure traditionally by years of schooling, is low, but the social capital in the family available for the child’s education is extremely high” (Coleman, 1990:591). Chapter 8 will explore the extent to which this idea can be applied to the role of young fathers.

Moreover, one of the important aspects of Coleman’s work is that he “was able to show that social capital was not limited to the powerful, but could also convey real benefits to poor and marginalised communities” (Field, 2003:20). This differs greatly from Bourdieu’s conceptualization of social capital, which is seen as something held by the higher classes and that it is used in order to maintain that position. This may be particularly important for studying young fathers, as it is known they often come from lower socio economic backgrounds. However, if we take Coleman’s view the potential positive contributions that young fathers can make become a possibility.

One aspect of Coleman’s conceptualisation of social capital in relation to the family is that it is based on the very traditional notion of the nuclear two-parent intact heterosexual family (Edwards *et al*, 2003). In Coleman’s (1988:S111) view,

the physical absence of adults may be described as a structural deficiency in family social capital. The most prominent element of structural deficiency in modern families is the single-parent family.

Such view is related to the idea explained above of the need for parents’ time investment in their children’s lives in order to transmit human capital. In Coleman’s view having two parents present in the household brings about greater attention and time for the child. Moreover, he believes that the more children the less time that parents have to dedicate to each, diluting the social capital in the family. This in turn means less human capital transmission to the children. Another aspect related to parents’ presence in the household is women’s employment outside the house which “can also be described as a removal from the household and the neighbourhood of much of the remaining social capital on which children and youth depend” (Coleman 1990:590). Coleman’s general view is that changes in family structure have led to a dearth of social capital (Edwards *et al*, 2003:5). However, Coleman does acknowledge that “the adult does not have to be a parent for the strong relation of adult and child to constitute social capital of benefit to the child” (Coleman, 1990:592). He mentions other adult figures, such as grandparents, teachers, and adult community leaders, as potential transmitters of human capital.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted different aspects of structuration, discourse and social capital theories, which compose the theoretical and conceptual framework of this thesis. Key issues from the three theories and their application to this research have been explored.

It has been argued that structuration allows for a focus on potential structural constraints on the father role and the extent to which young fathers can exercise their agency to overcome those constraints. One important aspect for this thesis is the interplay between young fathers' resistance to certain conditions brought about by their socio economic position, and the constrictions that the structure poses on them. Thus, for example, while many young men want to be there for their children and express a desire to do so, their lack of employment may pose a challenge to their involvement. Structuration theory can help shed light on the processes by which young men can overcome those barriers. However, it also helps in seeing when hurdles become too big to handle.

At the same time, the importance of acknowledging the potential influence of discourse on young fathers has been highlighted. Such influence can be seen as either being enabling or a constraining force. Thus I would argue that in research and policy the focus appears to be on more material aspects, such as the lack of employment, of educational qualifications or housing. It can be argued that the influence of something intangible, such as the way that young fathers are socially perceived is not often taken into account when thinking about young fathers' lives. Discourse theory contributes to this thesis by helping highlight the way in which policy and media discourses may influence the lives of young fathers, directly and indirectly.

Finally, social capital theories help investigate young men's experiences of fatherhood based on their socio-economic backgrounds and positioning in the social scale from a different lens than that of social exclusion. For example, social capital helps shed light on young men's perceptions of their life chances as related to growing up in deprived neighbourhoods. This reflection is in turn applied to their role as fathers and a desire to improve their children's well being and future. Social capital also allows the demonstration of certain non-economic contributions that young fathers can make to their children's lives.

Chapter 4: The Research design and process

This chapter presents what can be considered the engine of the research in this study: the methodological approach and method used, the practice of doing research and the overall rationale behind the decisions made in relation to the research design. From the early stages of designing this project, qualitative research was deemed as the appropriate approach to the study of young men's perception of their roles as fathers. A qualitative study facilitates the study of social subjects in detail, with depth, and showing the complexity, and context of individuals in society via the used of nuanced accounts of personal experiences. While it needs to be acknowledged that quantitative research is valuable and helps with broader generalisations in the study of society, such an approach did not fit the main purpose of this research study, which attempts to explore young fathers' lives from their multiple perspectives.

The first section of this chapter states the research aims and areas that this thesis is concerned with. It then goes on to explain in section two the ontological and epistemological position of this study and the rationale for it. The third section explores the main features of a qualitative approach to investigating the social world and argues the appropriateness of using this approach when exploring the issue of young fathers' perceptions of their roles.

Grounded Theory, its main features and applications is the subject of the fourth section. The chapter then moves on to explore the approach taken to qualitative interviewing as well as the limitations that interview data bring to a research study. Section six discusses the data analysis process, starting with the experience of transcription and coding. Finally, section seven deals with the practical issues of doing research: ethics, finding participants and the experience of interviewing.

4.1 The essential questions of ontology and epistemology

The importance of making one's ontological as well as epistemological position explicit and clear is often mentioned in social research books (Mason, 2002a; Grix, 2010; Blaikie, 2000). These two philosophical concepts are deemed vital for research design, and they refer to two different aspects of social reality. As Blaikie (2000:8) explains "ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality", while epistemology refers to "the claims or assumptions made about possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality". In short, ontology refers to what the social world is made of and epistemology to how we can claim to know about it.

However, it can be argued that laying out one's philosophical stand explicit is made difficult by the way in which authors often present different explanations and categorisations of those two essential aspects of social research. For example, Grix (2002:67) argues that "ontology is often wrongly collapsed together with epistemology, with the former seen as simply a part of the latter". Such view is refuted by Crotty (2003:10), who believes that "ontological issues and epistemological issues tend to emerge together". Moreover, while as just seen, Crotty (2003) conceives ontology and epistemology as one entity and Grix (2002) as separate entities, Lincoln and Guba (1994) put these two concepts under the umbrella of paradigms. On the other hand, Creswell (2013:6) speaks of "philosophical worldviews... a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" to refer to ontology and epistemology. Creswell (2013:6) states there are 4 worldviews: postpositivism, constructivism, pragmatism and transformative, each with their own elements. This thesis adheres to the constructivism worldview, which is in accord with a qualitative approach to investigating the social world.

According to Crotty (2003:42) constructionism is the view that

All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

Thus this thesis sees the world as being socially constructed. There are two essential aspects of constructionism that relate to the theoretical framework employed in this thesis: the emphasis on how interaction between human beings constructs the world as well as the relevance of the social context. This is in accord with how I view the interview situation: as a site for the co-construction of knowledge, and the resulting data, as built between the young fathers and myself, not as a representation of direct experience. In this sense, epistemologically speaking, this thesis defends the view that knowledge is constructed during the interview and is the result of the interaction between researcher and research participant. Another key issue is that I do not see those aspects of the social world as existing without my interpretation of them. In conclusion, this research is concerned with the interpretation, description as well as perceptions that the young men offered of their lives and specifically on their experiences of fatherhood and fathering. The focus is therefore not on the events themselves but rather on the young men's perspective and understandings of their experiences as young fathers.

4.2 Research aims

The overall aim of this study is to investigate young men's perceptions of their role as fathers and what makes it easier or more difficult to sustain it. This includes investigating the potential impact of different influences on the experience of being a father generally and on the father-child relationship. These influences include the young men's background and current situation, such as employment status, housing; the influence of significant others (partner, ex-partner, own fathers, friends and peers) as well as the environments in which these young men grew up and lived in. The study also seeks detailed descriptions of the kinds of activities that young fathers described engaging in when spending time with their children.

In young fatherhood research, there is a recurrent focus on the way in which young fathers often have difficulties supporting their families or child(ren) (Stein, 1997; Speak *et al*, 1997; Kiernan, 1995; Tyrer *et al*, 2005). I want to move away from traditional notions of the sole (or primary) role of the father as being tied to the economic provider, which I would argue is often the parameter by which young fathers are judged. One of my aims is to examine the one-to one intimate father-child relationship to show other ways in which young fathers can and do contribute to their children's lives, which may be similar to those of older fathers. Indeed, as the literature review chapter argued, contemporary discourses about fatherhood are based on the dichotomy between caring and providing and I want to examine young fatherhood under a wider spectrum of roles.

The difficulties encountered by young men to fulfill their roles are often related to the aforementioned fast-track transitions and middle-class normative expectations of youth transitions (Jones, 2002). While this is seen as negative by some, I am interested in seeing how young fathers actually juggled the many roles they can potentially adopt. This include being a young person and a father, student, provider, lover and partner.

Because the literature points out that young fathers are less likely to live with the mother of their child (Pears *et al*, 2005) I am keen to explore the living and relationship arrangements and how these shape their input in their children's lives. My aim is to explore the father-child dynamic that resulted from romantic relationship patterns and situations, and the roles that they adopt as a result of those. This also allows me to research young fathers in relation to contemporary changes in family practices and forms which have affected the role of the father generally.

Indeed, relationships with others, mainly with the mother of the child but also with her family potentially influence the role of the father in their children's lives (Bunting and McAuley, 2004). Research shows the father-child relationship is often affected by the relationship with the mother and the wider kin networks (Reeves, 2006). My interest is not only in areas of conflict but also sources of support.

The final aspect that I want to explore is the social environments in which fathering takes place and this include both the communities in which they or their children lived as well as social perceptions of their role. This interest sprung from the link between being a young father and being exposed to deprivation and exclusion (Swann *et al*, 2003) as well as from negative discourse on the role of the young father (Duncan, 2007). I am aiming to investigate the social networks young fathers had access to, and how those influenced their role as fathers. I want to see how young men overcame, or not, poor networks, and what positives they drew from those environments.

The research questions would thus be:

- What activities do fathers engage in with their children, both in terms of leisure (particularly play) as well as caring?
- How do transitions, both in relation to the child growing up as well as transitions into work or separation from a partner, influence the father-child relationship?
- What are their living arrangements and how do these shape their relationship with the child?
- How do the relationships with the partner, as well as family, affect and mould the relationship with the child?
- How do the places and spaces in which fathering takes place, both in terms of their homes as well as neighbourhood, shapes the role of the father?

In the course of the research some of these areas took a secondary role, while others gained importance. In this sense, these questions offered certain areas I wanted to explore, however, these were flexible and open to the stories of the young men, in accord with grounded theory. For example, in terms of housing, I wanted to look at the actual lay out of the house as well as the size, aiming to find out about how the physical space aided or made difficult the job of fathering. In my first five interviews I asked the young fathers to do a bird's eye view drawing of their home, thinking that this would be a good way of exploring this area. However, I soon realised that it was not producing any good data and dropped that technique. On the contrary, the theme of the neighbourhood took a primary role in the research, with some of the young fathers offering great reflective answers on having grown up in deprived neighbourhoods. New subjects appeared in the course of the research with one good example being reading and educating their children.

4.3 A qualitative approach to investigating the social world

To call yourself a 'qualitative' researcher settles surprisingly little
(Silverman, 2006:33).

Qualitative research entails a long list of research methods and methodologies as well as analytical approaches, and it can be taken as an umbrella term for all of them (Saldaña, 2011). To date there is not a single definition of what a qualitative approach actually is (Denzin and Lincoln, 2012; Snape and Spencer, 2003) which is taken by some as being problematic (Long and Godfrey, 2004) or a weakness (Higgs and Cherry, 2009). On the contrary, Mason (2002a:3) argues that the diversity of approaches and influences on qualitative research and the way in which it cannot be “neatly pigeon holed and reduced to a simple and prescriptive set of principles” is not a problem or weakness, but rather one of its strengths. One of the problems appears to be that sometimes qualitative research is defined by what it is not, quantitative, or by what it does not supposedly produce: numerical and quantifiable data (Silverman, 2006; Long and Godfrey, 2004). There are numerous discussions about the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy or divide and the usefulness of presenting these two research strands as opposed to each other (Grix, 2010; Mason, 2002a; Lapan *et al*, 2012). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter those debates, it is worth noting that the different approaches that are appropriate will depend on the research question to be addressed.

4.3.1 The core elements of qualitative research

Despite the variety, and sometimes contradictory approaches and methods employed for doing qualitative research, and despite the opening sentence of this main section⁵, there are some core elements which can be identified and used to describe what a qualitative approach to doing research entails. The definition of qualitative research by Denzin and Lincoln (2012:6-7) contains what could be considered most of the widely agreed features.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible [and it] involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative research is “grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’” (Mason, 2002a:3-4). This relates to the way in which qualitative inquiry aims to explore and understand detailed aspects of people’s lives and the meanings they attach to their lived

⁵ “To call yourself a ‘qualitative’ researcher settles surprisingly little” (Silverman, 2006:33).

worlds, as seen from their (multiple) perspectives (Stake, 2010). Such aim fits in with the epistemological approach in this thesis and its concern with how young men perceive their role as fathers, not on the events themselves. A qualitative approach also entails placing emphasis and significance on the interpretation that the investigator makes of the social world (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Moreover, there is often a focus on “emergent meanings” (Finlay, 2006) which means that data is both constructed and analysed inductively. As a result, the aim is to build concepts, theories or hypothesis rather than test them (Merriam, 2002). In this sense, the researcher is open to new developments or turns that occur in the field (Stake, 2010) and thus qualitative research practice is mainly flexible and iterative (Gibson and Brown, 2009:8).

One aspect still contested of contemporary qualitative research is the role that the researcher plays in all aspects of the research process. This can be referred to as bias in quantitative research and researcher subjectivity in qualitative inquiry (Finlay, 2006). Generally, it is now accepted that in most qualitative inquiry the aim of the researcher is not to be detached and objective, neither is subjectivity considered negative, although schools of positivist qualitative research exist (Minichiello and Kottler, 2009). Rather, this so-called subjectivity ought to be openly included in the research process. This position can be related to two aspects of qualitative research. First, qualitative inquiry is related to exploring the construction of meaning (Gibson and Brown, 2009), which in turn is linked to how knowledge is often viewed under this particular approach. Indeed, most qualitative researchers adhere to the view that knowledge does not exist outside the individual, waiting to be found, but rather that is constructed, or co-constructed between researcher and participant (Saldaña, 2011; Mason, 2002a). This means that certain personal characteristics, such as gender, race or age, as well as personal experiences, what Knowles (2006) terms baggage, have to be acknowledged as potentially affecting one’s observations of the world (Saldaña, 2011). In qualitative research this is called reflexivity and relates to the “process of reflecting on the role of the researcher in the construction of meaning and, critically of data” (Gibson and Brown, 2009:7). Indeed, as argued by Denzin and Lincoln (2012), since what has been termed the reflexive turn, objectivity from the researchers’ side has been put into questions and the space has been created for researchers to write themselves into the investigation⁶.

4.4 Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is defined as “one of the most popular” (Birks and Mills, 2010:1), “best known” (Oktay, 2010:3) or “enduringly popular” (Mills *et al*, 2006b:2) social research methodologies, with thousands of academic articles and books published since its beginnings nearly 50 years ago. In this section I explore the origins of Grounded Theory

⁶ However, it is argued by Charmaz (2005) that Grounded Theory has largely seen research data as having an objective status, which has taken her to develop a strand of Grounded Theory called Constructivist, as will be explored later.

and its development, as well as its main features and the reasons why it fits into the research rationale and aims of this thesis.

4.4.1 The climate in which Grounded Theory developed

Grounded Theory origins are located in the collaboration between two American sociologists: Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. In the late 60s they were jointly working on a project of dying in hospital and it was during these investigations that they developed a methodological strategy for conducting qualitative research. The academic context in which Grounded Theory arose takes us back to the aforementioned qualitative/quantitative divide in social research: qualitative investigations were increasingly used just as a prelude to the more scientific approach that quantitative claimed to offer. Thus Positivism⁷ guided the sociological investigations and qualitative research was often relegated to a secondary place (Charmaz, 2006; Birks and Mills, 2010).

Grounded Theory provided a legitimate qualitative approach per se to studying the social world. What is often considered ground breaking about this methodology is that it challenged certain social research beliefs, such as the separation of data collection and analysis, the divide between research and theory and the view that qualitative research could not generate theory by itself (Charmaz, 2006). Above all, Grounded Theory proposed an inductive approach to social research, one in which theory emerges from data rather than being deduced from pre-existing hypotheses. In the words of Glaser and Strauss (1967:3),

Our basic position is that generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses. We shall contrast this position with theory generated by logical deduction from a priori assumptions.

However, despite legitimizing the use of a qualitative approach, traditional Grounded Theory was actually ideated and developed with the influence of these two research paradigms: quantitative as well as qualitative. Nevertheless, it was positivism that exercised a stronger influence in the development of traditional Grounded Theory. It can be argued that it is precisely this big positivist influence that has drawn much of the criticism of the methodological approach, and that has also made it move forward. Indeed, it could be said that since the there have been changes in the way that the social world is conceptualized and how research is approached, and as Corbin (2008:viii) argues,

Throughout the years, what was initially Grounded Theory has evolved into many different approaches to building theory grounded in data. Each evolution has been an attempt to modernize or to extend the original methods, bringing it more in line with contemporary thought.

⁷ Hollis (1994:41) defines Positivism as “a term with many uses in social science and philosophy. At the broad end, it embraces any approach which applies scientific method to human affairs conceived as belonging to a natural order open to objective inquiry”

Is it for this reason that Birks and Mills (2010:1) conceptualize Grounded Theory “as a methodological spiral that begins with Glaser and Strauss’s original text and continues today”. One of these approaches is Constructivist Grounded Theory as developed by Charmaz, which is the strand adopted in this research, in accord with the particular qualitative approach discussed above.

4.4.2 What are the main features of Grounded Theory?

Grounded Theory methods consist of systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves... thus data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct (Charmaz, 2006:2).

This is Grounded Theory at its simplest: a way to construct and analyse data with the aim to build middle-range theories that are based, or grounded, in the data itself. In this sense, as mentioned earlier, Grounded Theory advocates an inductive approach to doing qualitative research. Charmaz (2000:510-11) identifies the main components of Grounded Theory as being “a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data, b) a two-step data coding process, c) comparative methods, d) memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses, e) sampling to refine the researcher’s emerging theoretical ideas, and f) integration of the theoretical framework”.

As mentioned earlier, in Grounded Theory data collection and data analysis are not seen as separate phases of the research process, but rather as two activities that happen simultaneously and inform each other. Grounded Theory proposes an iterative approach in which data analysis starts early because it is the emergent codes that will inform subsequent data collection and analysis. In this sense, “the method is designed to encourage researchers’ persistent interaction with their data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses” (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007:1).

Part of the iterative approach used in order to construct theory that is grounded in the data is to follow the method of comparative analysis. This involves the comparison of data with data to draw up codes, then comparing data with codes in order to put some order, then compare the codes to bring to the fore our tentative categories (Charmaz, 2000:360). In this sense, codes and categories emanate from the data, rather than coming from a hypothesis. This technique also ensures that the resulting theory remains close to the data. This was deemed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as one of the main strengths of Grounded Theory. As they explained,

Theory based on data can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is too intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification or reformulation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:4).

Glaser and Strauss provide two examples of theories based on data that have endured the passing of time: Weber's theory of bureaucracy and Durkheim's theory of suicide. These two theories, they argue, continue to excite and inspire scholars decades after their creation and thus they have stood the passing of time.

Finally, one of the main features of Grounded Theory is its inductive nature. In turn, the inductivist nature is one of the most contested features. The problem arises from the expectation in traditional Grounded Theory that the researcher is neutral and has no preconceived ideas about his/her field of research (Mills *et al*, 2006b). In fact, in Glaser and Strauss seminal book, one of the requirements to conduct a Grounded Theory study was to postpone the literature review until the end of the research as to not contaminate it (Charmaz, 2006; Dunne, 2011). However, for reasons that may appear obvious, for doctoral researchers, and it can be argued any other researchers, an initial review of the literature is an essential part of developing a research proposal and identify areas that have not yet been researched. Thus one of the issues with traditional Grounded Theory is its objectivist approach to the nature of social reality and its inclination towards positivism, which is one of the reasons why constructivist Grounded Theory emerged.

As argued earlier, since the beginnings of Grounded Theory, there has been the questioning of the possibility of data to truly have an objective status (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). It is argued by Mills *et al* (2006b) that Strauss and Corbin's further work on Grounded Theory can be considered constructivist. However, Charmaz (2000) opposes this view and believes that in Strauss and Corbin's work there is still the idea of an existing objective reality. For this reasons she argues that "to develop Grounded Theory for the 21st century...we must build upon the constructionist elements rather than objectivist leanings" (Charmaz, 2000:508). However Glaser (2012:28) questions Charmaz's constructivist take on Grounded Theory, labeling it a "misnomer". In essence, Glaser (2012) opposes the existence of Constructivist Grounded Theory on a number of levels, from the co-construction of data in the interview situation, to the need to include the researcher's voice in the data analysis as to avoid bias. In Glaser's view, traditional Grounded Theory advocates the passive listening in the interview situation, and the abstraction of concepts from interview data is enough to include the multiple perspectives. Moreover he argues that researcher bias, when present, should be weaved into the analysis as one more variable.

An important part of this research is that it does not view data as a reflection of reality, but rather as constructed or co-constructed as a result of the interaction between me, the researcher, and the participants that took part in the interviews. It was therefore essential to present the experience of young fathers as interpretations, rather than reflections of the experience per se. It is for this reason that Charmaz's re-working of Grounded Theory from a constructivist stance was particularly suited to my aims. As she explains,

Constructivists study how-and sometimes why- participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations... a constructivist approach not only theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do, but also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation (Charmaz, 2006:130).

Constructivist Grounded Theory therefore lies in the interpretivist tradition and one of its essential aspects is the aforementioned reflexivity in the research process. This fits in with the approach taken to qualitative interviews, and the co-construction of knowledge explored earlier in the thesis.

4.5 Qualitative interviewing

Qualitative investigation favours methods of data construction that involve personal contact between researcher and participant, but are by no means restricted to human interaction. For example, documents such as letters, diaries, and policy documents can be sources of data in qualitative studies (Mason, 2002a). For this study, the chosen research method was in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews. Doing focus groups, or conducting group interviews, was considered, but although it was recognised as a potentially effective tool to explore the areas that I wanted to study, there were several reasons not to pursue that method of research. First, logistically, given the difficulty in finding participants and arranging interviews, it was anticipated that it may be difficult to arrange a meeting date which all men could attend⁸. Also, given the intimate nature of the topic under study, it could limit what could be treated or explored and it may have also meant that some men would not have been as open as in a one-to-one interview. Finally, focus groups are particularly suited to explore shared meaning and understandings, but this thesis was interested in individual experiences of young fatherhood.

4.5.1 Qualitative interviews: main features

Mason (2002b:225) points out that

Interview methodology begins from the assumption that it is possible to investigate elements of the social by asking people to talk, and to gather or construct knowledge by listening to and interpreting what they say and how they say it.

⁸ I did not know at the time where the participants were going to be recruited from.

Qualitative interviewing involves a specific epistemological position in the sense that it is believed that by means of conversing, asking and listening to people the data required to answer the research question(s) can be generated. In turn, this implies a certain ontological position because there is the aim to understand the social world and create knowledge through people's points of views, through their experiences, acts, feelings and emotions, as narrated by them.

Qualitative interviews encompass a rather large list of interview types or strategies, such as narrative, biographical, psychoanalytical, focused, semi-standardised, expert, ethnographic interviews, semi-structured and so on (Wengraf, 2001; Mason 2002a; Flick, 2002). It is important to highlight that qualitative interviewing prioritises people's accounts as main sources of data, and talk and text as the way of producing knowledge (Mason, 2002b). One of the limitations of the method is its reliance on verbal accounts as it "tends to direct our gaze away from visual, spatial and observational social worlds" (Mason, 2002a:83). Moreover, I would argue that another limitation is that single qualitative interviews mean that the researchers only gets a snapshot of the participants' lives, which is the narrative that they create in the course of the interview.

Silverman (2007) argues that 'qualitative researchers' almost Pavlovian tendency to identify research design with interview has blinkered them to the possible gain of other kinds of data" (Silverman, 2007:42). My awareness of the limitations that only using interview data brings to this research made me think about alternative or complementing methods. For example, other forms of data, such as photographs or diaries by the research participants were briefly considered, however for methodological, practical and ethical issues they were finally not included.

The actual interview strategy deployed in this study was semi-structured, which even though it contains themes and questions to be covered, it can be argued that

at the same time there is an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects (Kvale, 1996:124).

There were in fact two interview schedules (see appendixes 1 and 2) and in a sense two ways in which I conducted the interviews, which relate to two phases of the research process. The first interview schedule was developed in accord with the research questions specified earlier in the chapter. These in turn had been informed by the academic literature and the identified gaps in the knowledge around young fatherhood. The research questions thus

gave the overall general areas for the interview schedule. For each area I developed specific interview questions that were to be used as probes. These reflected more detailed parts of the young men's lives that were missing in previous young fatherhood research, and which I believed would contribute to the field.

In the first initial phase 5 interviews were conducted (Tim, Max, Greg, Mark and Kieran) and these young men all came from the same project, DNA Mix "a project for young fathers who need somewhere to go to talk about their experiences, get advice and help from their peers and also to express themselves creatively" (www.individio.com/dna-mix/, see page 88). The young men were interviewed in a variety of places, from a noisy Pizza Hut to a quiet greasy spoon cafe to, only in one case, a young father's home which he shared with his partner and baby. These interviews were greatly shaped by what I call 'the literature informed self' as well as by a lack of practice on my part. First of all, the interview schedule I produced was possibly too detailed (see appendix 1), probably due to my insecurity at not having conducted qualitative interviews in a relatively long while. Moreover, reflecting on my role during the interview, I soon realised that I was sometimes trying to follow certain pre-conceived ideas and conceptions that my initial review of the literature had given me. For example, when interviewing Dan, a 19 year old father of two, I brought up the subject of growing up without a father and the potential influence on him:

Well, you've done pretty well... in term of being a dad has it affect you in any way do you feel like not having had a dad with you did affect you in any way?

I don't think so no, my mum did a good enough job really, she was a mother and a dad. It didn't really bother me...

And in terms of like, I don't know having a role model... I don't know someone to look up to or imitate?

No I haven't had that... just my own person, I think yeah.

(Dan, 19. 2 years old son & 11 months old daughter, resident)

I remember very well this interview moment, my (internal) surprise when hearing from Dan that growing up without a father did not affect him. This contradicted what I had read in the literature on young fatherhood, as well as to what the two men I had interviewed before him told me: the influence of father absence on young men's lives. In some ways this related to the point made by classic Grounded Theory of delaying the literature review until the end, as to not to contaminate research findings (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However, given the impossibility to do so, one option is to turn to reflecting on your role as researcher. As I did so, I noticed how I was trying to make Dan fit all those stories that I read about and heard before. It is for this reason that in the second phase of the research I adopted a more open interview approach. I developed a new interview schedule that was simpler, for example it had fewer questions. I also paid special attention to giving the young men the steering wheel of the interview, and follow the particularities of their stories. Inevitably, there was

intervention on my side at times when I may have re-directed the interview back to some of the general themes I wanted to cover. But overall, in this second phase I tried to let go of my literature informed self.

4.5.2 Interviews: conversations with a purpose?

In some ways, qualitative interviewing is taken to be close to ordinary, everyday life talk due to its supposed conversational and thus flexible, dynamic and fluid style (Mason, 2002a; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). However, qualitative interviews differ from everyday or ordinary dialogue in the sense that they are a conversation which “has a structure and a purpose” (Kvale, 1996:5). Nevertheless it can be argued that in actual fact any every day, casual conversation has a purpose, or a structure. By means of conversing we may be inquiring how someone is feeling, what is happening in their lives or to know someone’s opinion on a subject, amongst an endless list of reasons. Therefore it can be argued that what differentiates qualitative interviews to everyday conversations is the actual purpose, which is the creation or improvement of knowledge⁹ (Kvale, 1996; Wengraf, 2001).

Moreover, another differentiating feature is the manner in which the interviewer is not a passive recipient of information, but rather s/he plays an active role in the construction of knowledge (Silverman, 2006). This brings up two much-discussed subjects in relation to the practice of qualitative interviewing. First, there is the issue of how the construction of knowledge is seen in an interview situation. Secondly, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and the power dynamics between them during the interview encounter.

In relation to how the interview situation is seen, this research takes the interview to be the site for co-producing and co-constructing knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee. As explained earlier, there is the majority view in qualitative studies that there is not a reality out there waiting to be uncovered by the researcher, which would point towards a position in which data is collected or excavated rather than generated (Mason, 2002a). As Mason (2002a:63) argues,

According to this perspective, meanings and understandings are created in an interaction, which is effectively a co-production involving researcher and interviewees.

There is also the acknowledgement, in qualitative interviewing generally, that the characteristics of the interviewer, such as gender, age, ethnicity, social status etc. can potentially affect

⁹ Some researchers, especially those involved in emancipatory research, may argue that another purpose of the interview is the empowerment of the subject, while other may view the interview as a therapeutic encounter.

the dynamic of the interviewer-interviewee relationship or encounter (Saldaña, 2011). It is believed that this may be related to the actual topic of the interview, so for example men may prefer talking to a female interviewer about sensitive topics, but to a male about work issues (Charmaz, 2006:27). Moreover, one of the aspects of social research generally, and of qualitative interviewing specifically, that has for long been debated is the power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. This has its root in feminist research (Oakley, 1981), and it has transferred to a number of other fields such as disability and childhood studies (France, 2004). With reference to this research, the power relations between me, the researcher, and the young men, the research participants, was not a straightforward one. It is argued by Robinson and Kellett (2004:81) that power “is not just about force but the creation of knowledge... through communication we are able to perceive and exercise power”. What this means for example is that as an interviewer I had certain control and power over the knowledge that was being produced in the interview. This was caused to an extent by my position as a higher educated, middle-class researcher who was inquiring into their lives, in order to obtain data and complete a study. However, it may be argued that the young fathers were not completely powerless, as they were given the explicit option of stopping the interview whenever they wanted and not talk about any topic that made them feel uncomfortable. In this sense, they were made aware that they had certain powers over the interview. Added to this there is the fact that I did not have any children myself. Many of the young fathers knew this as they had asked me about it. This meant that in some respects, the participants were the “experts”. It can also be said that research participants have some power in the interview as the holders of knowledge that the researchers need.

4.6 Putting order and giving shape: the process of data analysis

It is argued in this section that the process of data analysis of qualitative interviews starts at the point of transcription.

The next step is coding, where the content of the resulting transcripts are organized by giving labels to discrete parts. Finally, these two steps are brought together in the write up phase. The process of coding in this thesis was done using Nvivo, which has its own methodological implications. Finally, this section will discuss the actual data analysis and the significance of context in the process of putting the interview data back together.

In the process of analysing the data certain themes appeared central to many of the young fathers’ stories. Indeed, coding made apparent certain areas which were dominant and common amongst the young men’s narratives as well as the categories that were recurrent. These were grouped in overarching themes, which then formed the basis of the four analysis chapters: the process of becoming a father (chapter 5), the one-to-one relationship with the child(ren) (chapter 6), the relationship with the mother and living arrangements (chapter

7) and the influences of growing up in deprived neighbourhoods, family background and professional and social views of young fatherhood (chapter 8).

4.6.1 Transcription

It was anticipated that the interviews would be digitally recorded, with previous acquired consent from participants, which they all agreed to. The initial result was data in audio format. However, as Mason (2002a:150) points out,

Whatever it is that will be counted as data, according to your perspective and the reading you wish to make, this must take the form (or be put into a form) that can be readily sorted and organized for analytical purposes.

Thus the audio recorded interviews had to be turned into text transcripts, to be put into a form that would allow me to analyse it. As Lapadat (2000:204) explains “the usual first step in making spoken language manageable is to transcribe it as written text”. Thus, all the final data used for this project was text, and more precisely, interview transcripts.

It is argued that transcribing is the first step to analysing, and in the words of Lapadat (2000:204) “the process of doing transcription also promotes intense familiarity with the data, which leads to the methodological and theoretical thinking essential to interpretation”. Indeed, she argues that as soon as the researcher starts the task of transcribing, important decisions such as the form that the data will take, and what will be included and excluded, are being made. Furthermore, Lapadat (2000) is against establishing conventions and rules for transcribing as she believes that decisions around this activity have to be made in accordance with the researcher’s analysis purposes. I agree with Lapadat’s stand, and the way the interview data was transcribed was in accord with the type of analysis, and the readings that I wished to make. Thus, for example, if the main purpose of my research had been to analyze the interview dynamics between interviewee and interviewer I may have included every detail about overlap in the conversation, length of the silences or body language field notes. Thus, I made those strategic decisions on the layout of the interview transcripts in accordance with the ‘reading’ that I wished to make of my data (Mason, 2002a). My interest was in the content of the interviews, what was being said rather than the how or in what manner. It is for this reason that my coding strategy was to keep the text simple and to edit out most of the utterances, overlappings as well as verbal expressions such as laughing. Some utterances were kept, mainly represented by the term “erm” in order to show that the narratives were not always linear. I decided to represent pauses and silences with “...”, again to represent the dynamics of the interviews.

Although my intention was to transcribe all the interviews myself, this was not possible due to time restrictions. Even though, as just discussed, transcription is an important task and one related to data analysis, it is also very time consuming. As a result, 10 of the interviews were transcribed by a professional shortly after they were done. On a practical level, outsourcing the interview transcription had the benefits of speeding the research process. One of the negative aspects of outsourcing this task is that accuracy may be lost. This in turn needs to be compensated by checking and contrasting the transcripts with the recordings of the interviews.

4.6.2 The second analytical step: coding

It is argued that “unlike quantitative data analysis, clear-cut rules about how qualitative data analysis should be carried out have not been developed” (Bryman, 2004:398). This may seem to contradict the idea of doing Grounded Theory, which offers a set of coding steps to analyse data. However, it can be argued that analysing qualitative data goes beyond a set of techniques. Indeed, it can be said that it is what we count as data as well as the readings of the data that we decide to make that will guide the analysis (Mason, 2002a). This is particularly relevant when adopting a constructivist approach, which pays attention to the process of producing data in the interview situation. However, this is not to say that there are no common techniques or approaches for analysing qualitative data or broad guidelines that can be followed (Bryman, 2004; Blaikie, 2000; Mason, 2002a).

It was anticipated that the analysis of the interview data would be done by coding, which is one of the main aspects of Grounded Theory and qualitative analysis generally. The main idea of coding is that “the researcher applies a uniform set of categories systematically and consistently to their data” (Mason, 2002a:150-151). When it comes to Grounded Theory, Charmaz (2006:46) proposes that there are

At least two main phases: 1) a initial phase involving naming each word, line or segment of data followed by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data.

The first phase she names *initial coding*, and here the researcher needs to be open and develop codes that are closed to the data, with particular emphasis on action. In the second phase, called *focused coding*, is where the selection of the most frequent codes takes place. This is done by comparing data with data, then data with codes, which helps refine them. Thus no pre-established theoretical concepts (i.e. individualisation, masculinity) are used. Moreover, the more abstract categories developed will be based on the codes that emerge

from our active engagement with the data (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, if we take for example, the codes “being a family”, “bonding”, “caring” and “reading”, these codes suggest building categories around: agency (being active in their children’s lives), self-presentation (how they chose to present themselves to me in the interview situation) as well as identity (how doing fathering activities becomes part of their being).

Although coding can be done manually, there is now a range of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), such as NUD*IST and Nvivo. In this study I used Nvivo as it was a program I was familiar with from my Masters as well as from my professional life. I deemed it useful and appropriate tool to help me organize my data for its subsequent analysis. Indeed, as Mason (2002a) argues, “these packages can facilitate the process of data analysis, particularly by aiding with organization and retrieval”. However, the slicing of data into sections that are coded with the help of a software package is not without methodological issues, and as Mason (2002a:161) explains “you must check that your approach to epistemology and explanation is consistent with (or at least complementary to) the one underlying the software”. It is argued that these software packages are particularly suited for Grounded Theory studies (Bringer *et al*, 2004) which have at their core the activity of coding. Although these packages have sophisticated features, which can make the analysis of data resemble that of quantitative research (Bringer *et al*, 2004), only the most basic ones were used in this study: organizing and retrieving. Moreover, Richards (2002a:269) argues that one of the dangers is to fall in what she has termed “coding fetishism”. As she explains “over-coding and ritualistic coding that loses the drive of interpretation are in my view the major unintended consequences of qualitative computing” (Richards, 2002a:269). Being aware of this danger, I tried not to use coding with Nvivo as an end in itself but rather as a means to interpret and analyse my data. In Coffey and Atkinson (1996:27) words, codes were used as “heuristic devices”, helping the analysis of the interviews.

The first five interviews were transcribed and coded, providing a general coding framework which I could then use to analyse the rest of the interviews. These codes were either based on the aforementioned tentative areas (i.e. playing with children) or emanated from the interviews directly (i.e. reading to children). Thus, a set of initial codes were drawn both from the topic guide research questions as well as the first five interviews. Thus coding categories were set up based on coding five transcripts, which gave me a better idea of the themes that were to be covered in subsequent interviews and helped me refine the interview guide.

However, new categories were added as the analysis of the following 17 interviews unfolded. Indeed, while the initial 5 interviews set up a general frame, there were other categories that emerged from coding other interviews. Interview excerpts that were grouped under the same

code were then analysed to look for patterns and commonalities, meaning the analysis was done cross-sectionally (Mason, 2002a). Unlike other analytical approaches, such as narrative analysis in which data is analysed along cases (Riessman, 2008), I analysed my data across cases, comparing the experiences of young fathers in order to find common themes and discrepancies. The constant comparative method, as stated earlier, is also an essential part of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). All the interview excerpts that were under the same code were analysed together, in order to look for similarities, differences and patterns (Mason, 2002a).

One of the perils with cross-sectional analysis and with the use of Nvivo is that in the process of segmenting of data and grouping those segments under concepts, the context of the content of the interviews may be lost (Mason, 2002a). The units of analysis were excerpts from the interviews, but in order to preserve the context, and avoid the fragmentation of participants' lives, these were often kept longer. Also, I had a table with demographic information as well as pen portraits (see appendix 3), which helped me bring in the context when needed. Moreover, one of the benefits of using Nvivo was that I could easily check where the excerpt, the unit of analysis, was located within the interview transcript..

4.6.3 Data analysis: looking at the social context

One of the advantages of carrying out the interviews yourself and thus working with primary data is that it offers a better grounding to do a reflexive reading or analysis of the data. As Mason (2002a:149) explains,

a reflexive reading will locate you as part of the data you have generated, and will seek to explore your role and perspective in your generation and interpretation of data.

In this sense, when as a researcher you produce primary data, for example by interviewing, it is easier to bring certain aspects of the interview situation, for example tensions or interviewee subjectivities (for example, the situation encountered with Dan discussed earlier in page 75). Moreover, this is in tune not only with the aim of making the process of data analysis more transparent but also with discourse and questioning of the production of meaning (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Although the analysis of data is not done in a discursive way, this thesis takes knowledge and meaning created in the interview not as given but as socially constructed and expressed through an equally socially influenced language. Indeed, “transforming a lived experience into language and constructing a story about it is not straightforward, but invariably mediated and regulated by controlling vocabularies” (Riessman, 2008:3). This corresponds with the idea that interviews do not provide a straightforward insight into the participants' lives

and thus in the same way that participants tell stories, the researcher also constructs stories from the data.

My analytical approach takes one aspect that is vital to narrative analysis, as well as to other approaches: the belief in the importance of the social, cultural and historical context of the participants' lives. However this is not to be considered a narrative study as the way the data has been analysed does not follow narrative convention. As Riessman (2008:8) explains, "stories must always be considered in context, for story telling occurs at historical moments, with its circulating discourses and power relationships". This is, I believe, of importance for this project for several reasons. For example, the young fathers interviewed have a background that they feel has had an impact on their lives and trajectories. This relates not only to growing up in an urban environment, specifically in London, but also to growing up in deprived neighbourhoods and estates. Also, the culture of single motherhood and of fatherless families was brought to the fore by the young fathers, bringing in current debates and discourses about family life in the UK. Moreover, something as contemporary as crime, gang and gun culture was highlighted by the participants, both in terms of their lives as well as the future of their children. Finally, all the young fathers in this research are of black or mixed heritage, which is at the centre of debates surrounding youth crime in socially excluded inner-city areas as well as of absent fatherhood and its potential negative effects on young people. Indeed, the greater likelihood of fathers of black ethnic minority background not living with their children has appeared to suggest a scenario in which these fathers are completely absent (Fatherhood Institute, 2010). However, it is argued by Reynolds (2009) that the parenting role of black fathers (both of Caribbean and African decent) and their contribution is always measured against the white middle-class ideal of fatherhood. Instead, she believes that "any attempts to explain and understand black men's fathering identities and practices should acknowledge the appropriate historical and cultural contexts" (Reynolds, 2009:15). She further argues that these contexts have been ignored and need to be incorporated when researching the fathering practices of these groups of fathers, as well as when designing policies and services for them. Not doing so results in only negative portrayals being offered, which do not match with the lived realities of many black fathers.

In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that the experiences and feelings of these young men are located within those broader social contexts. As Elliott (2005:39) explains "studying an individual biography doesn't bring with it the isolated individual, but rather an awareness of the individual in society". Thus, this allows for linking the individual to greater social structures, the micro and the macro aspects of social life that is an essential part of structuration theory. It is my belief that it is a very particular time and climate that the stories of these young fathers encapsulate, not only in terms of fatherhood generally and young fatherhood specifically but also in terms of youth in inner city deprived areas and intergenerational cycles. Similarly, the discourses that the young fathers draw from should be incorporated in the analysis as there

is a focus on the way in which they locate themselves within their stories. Thus discourses around fatherhood in contemporary society, such as the breadwinner/caring father divide, new fatherhood and masculinity, informed the analysis. Also, discourses around youth and social exclusion, family and education were included too.

In general terms it can be said that the young fathers in this research had rather individual trajectories, which adds evidence to the argument that young fathers cannot be seen as a homogeneous group (Sherriff, 2007). In relation to the research, it made the analysis of the interviews challenging. For example, it was sometimes difficult to group the young fathers' experiences together without losing the essence of their individual stories. For this reason I tried to bring up the context and background of each of the participants in the course of the analysis, as will be seen in the following chapters. In this sense, sometimes references are made to the particular situation of the young man's experience that I am using to illustrate a more general point. Moreover, it is for this reason that I have often used long quotes, rather than short (2-3 lines) interview excerpts. This was decision was made in order to give the reader a better sense of the young fathers' narratives, their background and context. Long quotes are placed outside the main text. However, I have occasionally inserted short quotes into the main text in order to use the young father's exact words on the issue under investigation, related to the longer quote that I used (see for example pages 124, 146 or 154).

4.7 The practice of doing research

In this last section of the chapter I move on to the actual doing of research. First I explain the ethical considerations of the study, both in relation to the participants as well as myself as researcher. It then moves on to the issue of recruiting participants and conducting the interviews.

4.7.1 Ethical considerations

Prior to the start of the fieldwork, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Committee. This involved trying to predict any ethical issues that could potentially arise in the course of the research, particularly around the carrying out of the interviews. It included not only being able to acknowledge the potential vulnerability of the research participants and the distress that the interviews could cause, but also my safety. Thus, it was acknowledged in the research design that this was a sensitive subject and the exploring of the issue could potentially be distressing for participants. For example, some of the participants could have had harmful past experiences, such as abuse, family breakdown, substance use by parents, incarcerations – and these issues could come up in the course of the interviews. Information about sources of help was sought before the start of the interviews and compiled. In case of apparent distress, the plan was to give the

young men the information, as well as a follow-up call to ensure that the levels of distress had reduced and not caused any further harm.

In relation to my safety, there were a number of measures that I took. For example, I had a mobile phone specifically for contacting the young fathers, and I never contacted interviewees via my personal phone. I also aimed to conduct all interviews either in the organisation where I was hoping to recruit the young fathers, or in a public place. This was possible in all but one case, with Kieran. He did not tell me until I was on the train to meet him that he did not have money to pay the bus fare to come to the station, as we agreed. I took the bus to the estate in which he lived and there were no cafes nearby. Because his girlfriend and baby were home and he lived in a ground floor flat, and there was a positive feeling of trust towards him (I had met him before and we had spoken on the phone) I decided to do the interview at their house.

I also had to be aware that some of the fathers may have never talked about their past and present situation, or that they may find it difficult to do so or they may not want to talk about certain issues. Thus special attention was placed into the manner in which the questions were asked as well as the setting in which the interviews took place. Prior to agreeing to take part in the interview, participants received a leaflet which clearly spelt out the aims of the research and the types of issues that they would be expected to talk about (see appendix 4). This was written in non-academic and lay language, in order to be accessible and engaging. The research was again explained when first contact was made with the potential participants to ensure that they knew and understood it and to give them the chance to ask any questions.

Informed consent was crucial and along with a written form (appendix 5) I also briefed them about the content verbally as I considered this good practice. This was done to ensure that all points were correctly understood and to give them the opportunity to ask questions. There were several key aspects that to me were essential to get across. An important part of the research was to assure the participants that their identity, as well as what they told me, would remain confidential, unless they disclosed information that involved hurting or neglecting children or breaking the law. Related to this, I sought their agreement to tape-record the interview. This, I believed, would benefit the interview as I would not have to focus on taking notes and could pay greater attention to their narratives. All the young fathers agreed to be digitally recorded.

Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw or not answer any questions or areas that may arise in the course of the interview. This point was emphasized at the start of each interview. None of the research participants ought to feel like they have to carry on with the

interview, or answer all questions, because they agreed or gave consent. Moreover, in the case of this research, this was particularly important, as participants received £25 to take part in the interview¹⁰ which brings about certain ethical issues. To me, one of them was not to make the young men feel coerced to reveal information that they did not want to disclose. Another issue for me was that I did not want the young fathers to feel they had to finish the interview or that they did not have the power over when to stop it. For this reason, the cash payment was given to them at the start of the interview, once the consent form had been read and signed, in case they decided they did not want to continue with it. This was explained to them verbally, thus re-enforcing what was written in the consent form.

I encountered two research situations in which the young men explicitly said they did not want to talk about a certain issue. First there was Mason who both he and his then girlfriend went to jail and had been released 7 months before the interview took place. When I asked him about their break up he answered with *I don't want to go too much into it* followed by an explanation on how they are still on good terms. Having understood his desire not to enter this area, I followed by asking him a question which moved away from the relationship with his ex-girlfriend. Second, there was Jayden, whose 3 months old son had been in foster care for 6 weeks at the time of the interview. When I inquired about why he was put in care with the possibly confusing question *Do you mind telling me why he went...?* He answered *No* to which I replied *You don't want talk about it?* His final answer was a rotund *No*. Moreover, 40 minutes into the interview, Jayden also signaled to me that he wanted to go by saying '*and this is the last question because I have to go*'.

It can be argued that the interview situation is one of power relations, as was mentioned earlier, and these are examples of those. Following a feminist approach to interviewing, which advocates a breaking down of hierarchical positions between the interviewer and interviewee (Oakley, 1981); I felt it was ethically necessary to give the young men control over the subject matter. Ethics ought to be constantly applied, they ought to be part of research practice, and not only something that one gets clearance from by an institutional body. This, I would argue, is sometimes done in detriment of the depth of the resulting interview data. For example, in the case of Jayden, I only got a partial view of his experience of fatherhood due to his unwillingness to speak about why his child was put in care.

4.7.2 Recruiting participants

Young fathers are known for being a group that it is difficult to access, particularly those who do not live with the mother of the child (Tyrrer *et al*, 2005). For this reason, recruiting participants was expected to be challenging and so this task started very early on in the

¹⁰ With this payment I hoped to both encourage participation and was also seen as a gesture of gratitude towards their time and effort

research process. The location chosen for this research was London, as through my literature searches I found that there was a lack of research on young fathers specifically from London. Moreover, certain Boroughs in London have some of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in England, which meant that it was an appropriate location, to conduct the study (Health and Public Service Committee, 2009).

My selection criteria was that the young fathers had to be not older than 25 and this decision was based on two points. First, the fact that this was often the cut-off age in other research projects (Speak *et al*, 1997; Ross *et al*, 2009; Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011). Secondly, even though the age bracket of what constitutes a young father is arbitrary, services that provide support for young fathers often set the age limit at 25 (Sherriff, 2007). Since the research was about young fathers' perception of their relationships with their children, one requirement was that they either had contact with their children at the time of the interview or at some point in the past. Only one participant (Asthon) had never had contact with his daughter, who was 10 months old when I interviewed him. However, as I did not realise that this young man was not in touch with his daughter until a few minutes into the interview, I decided to carry on. Thus even though Ahston could not shed light into the essential aspect of my study, he provided insight into a number of related areas (for example, growing up in deprived neighbourhoods, or in a single mother household amongst others). Also it gave me a view into why he decided to keep away from his daughter, and the positive influence that becoming a father, albeit an absent one for the time being, had on his life. Other than the age limit and contact with the child, there were no further requirements in terms of number of children or their ages, living arrangements or romantic relationship status.

The first strategy employed to recruit participants was to conduct a city- wide internet search looking for organisations or projects that supported young fathers. I contacted organisations such as Coram (www.coram.org.uk) who offered help for young parents and Working with Men (www.workingwithmen.org) who ran a project called Young Fathers' Initiative (www.young-fathers.org.uk/) which is still in place. Other places which I contacted were Brent dads (www.brent.gov.uk/media.nsf/tbm87feb2009/LBB-53) and Coram Camden. This strategy provided me with little success. I identified two issues. First, those organizations with established programmes were either protective of the young fathers and in one case they had just been part of a research project, therefore they did not want to put them forward again. Secondly, another issue was that some of the projects specifically aimed at young fathers had ceased to exist, despite being online. This points towards a lack of continuity when it comes to offer and maintain young fathers' projects and services. Indeed, many projects seemed to be funded only for a limited time period, which was one of the problems identified by one of the young fathers' workers I spoke to, Tim. This situation was also encountered on the second recruitment phase of my research when I contacted the South Kingsland Youth

Partnership who ran a sports programme for young fathers. By the time I got in touch, their project had finished as they only got funding for 3 months and claimed that they no longer had contact with the young fathers that took part. This puts into question the real impact that a project that runs only for a few months can have.

4.7.3 Gendered services and limited take up

In Hackney I contacted young fathers' organizations or projects as well as more general support services such as Sure Start. My experience of trying to recruit participants this way confirmed and reinforced what I had learned from the literature and from my London wide search: young fathers are a hard to reach population/group. One of the first hurdles I encountered was the way in which services that stated in their website to be geared towards young parents in reality dealt mainly with young mothers. Thus the organisations' stated aims, and the actual workings often differed.

For example, the service I first contacted, the *Hackney Young Families support services*, "aims to provide help and co-ordinate a range of services for vulnerable young people who are or are about to become young parents and are trying to cope with a variety of emotional and practical problems" (www.family-action.org.uk) Because *people* and *parents* were the expressions used, rather than *women* and *mothers*, I assumed that they would be able to help. However, when I contacted them via telephone and I mentioned young fathers they referred me to an organisation that deals specifically with *fathers*. Similarly, *The Learning Trust's* program *Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood: The Vulnerable Pupils Team*¹¹ state how they "take a holistic approach to teenage parenthood and education, and are committed to supporting teenage mothers and fathers, as well as the families of young parents". When I spoke to them, they explained that they "had only had 2 or 3 fathers, and this was a year ago". I asked why this was the case and was told that the way they worked with the fathers was through the girls, and the workers could not sustain the young fathers (i.e. keep them involved). This resonates with recruitment strategies commonly used in research on young fatherhood which use mothers as way of involving the young fathers (Osborn, 2007).

However, the limited number of young fathers engaged in services which are not just targeted to young *fathers* but to young *parents*, seems to be in accord with issues that come up in the literature, such as invisibility, their lack of service uptake and the difficulty of accessing young fathers. Moreover when contacting the fathers' worker from Sure Start he explained that even though they aimed to support fathers of all ages they only seemed to get older ones, and the youngest he had on his records was 28. In this respect, it can be argued that this group of fathers remains invisible to society, to public policy as well as to those professionals who look after their well-being. It can be deemed significant that in a study about young people

¹¹ "(http://www.learningtrust.co.uk/community/teenage_pregnancy)

in care, researchers found that most professionals working with young men did not know whether such men were fathers, thus most of them were unable to help the researchers of that study with recruiting participants (Tyrer *et al*, 2005). Such a state of affairs is partly related to the lack of statistical information that is recorded and kept about young fatherhood, but also because “workers do not routinely collect data about them or include them in services that are for young “parents” ” (Sherriff, 2007:4). I would argue that this issue puts into question the strategies that are being used, by organisations or support services, to recruit young men and whether young fathers are in fact taken into account when planning projects and services for young parents.

4.7.4 Finding participants (finally)

At the beginning of September 2007, in one of the searches I conducted for young fathers projects, I came across “DNA Mix” which was “a project based in East & West London for Young Dads who are interested in Music Film & Radio” (myspace.com/dnamixuk). The project aimed to help young fathers get into the music, media and radio industries. The idea was that they learned the skills needed to work in those industries through expressing their experiences of young fatherhood. They organised a one day event in East London, in which workshops took place. I contacted one of the partners of the DNA Mix Project, The Ideas Foundation (www.ideasfoundation.org.uk/). They agreed for me to go and help out with registration which gave me the chance to meet and approach the young fathers who attended.

I created a leaflet (see appendix 4) in which I explained the nature of the study and I included my research mobile phone number as well as my e-mail address. As the day went on, when the fathers were taking a break from the different activities, I approached them. This gave me the chance to talk to them face to face and explain what the research was about and why I was doing it, as well as giving them the opportunity to ask any questions. All the young fathers, a total of 12, agreed to take part in the interviews. The final numbers interviewed from those were 7, as the remaining 5 were not picking up the phone, neither responded to messages or the phone number they gave me ceased to exist. From those seven participants, I did five interviews in October 2007, which were analysed and provided me with an initial set of themes and categories that were used to refine subsequent data analysis. They also gave me the opportunity to reflect on my role as a researcher and, I believe, better my interview skills.

I believe that the DNA Mix gathering was an ideal setting to meet participants, since the day was all about fatherhood and fun activities. This meant that the young fathers were generally in a good mood and possibly more receptive to the idea of talking to a researcher. Also, as explained above, I offered 25 pounds in cash per interview, which made me more comfortable

inviting the young men to take part in the study. In relation to recruiting participants it can be argued that paying interviewees can be seen as a way of affecting the selection process: those in greater need will be more likely to take part. However, given how hard it is to access young fathers I deemed it a necessary (and justifiable) strategy to encourage participation and as an acknowledgement of their time. The difficulty accessing young fathers is partly related to the aforementioned invisibility in the settings where they can be normally reached, such as health services as well as teenage pregnancy support groups, organisations and programs. The way in which when services do exist the take up tends to be limited, as well as the short lived nature of many programs all add to making young fathers a hard to reach group in a research setting.

In the second stage of the search for young fathers I focused on a specific borough, Hackney. This borough was chosen for practical as well as methodological reasons, with the latter having a stronger influence on my decision. As already explained, the majority of young fathers come from deprived backgrounds and with Hackney being one of the most deprived boroughs in England, coming second both in 2007 and 2008 on “The English Indices of Deprivation 2010” (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, 2011) it seemed an appropriate place to conduct my research. Also, in 2006, when this research started it was third on the list of the 10 boroughs with the highest teenage pregnancy rates (DFES, 2006b). Hackney also has a diverse ethnic make-up as recorded in the most recent Census (ONS, 2011), which increased the feasibility of a multi-ethnic approach, an under-researched area when it comes to young fathers. On the positive side, Hackney has a young population and many open spaces, with 62 parks in the borough, facilitating access to free outdoor leisure for families. In recent years recorded crime as well as teenage pregnancy rates have decreased, while the employment rate has gone up (<http://www.teamhackney.org/hackneyfacts>). Also, I lived in the Hackney which not only facilitated fieldwork but also meant that I was familiar with the surroundings the young fathers lived in and was aware of the problems and tensions in the neighbourhood.

Through one of my failed attempts at finding young fathers in Hackney I was directed to an organisation called Immediate Theatre (www.immediate-theatre.com/). I contacted them and found out that, amongst many projects involving disadvantaged young people in Hackney, they ran one called “Meet the parents”. It was described by them as “an innovative peer-led project that aims to reduce teenage pregnancy rates and improve sexual health and relationships amongst young people”. The project trains young fathers and mothers to deliver sex and relationship education in schools and to “develop a toolkit of activities to explore teenage pregnancy using scripted material and drama techniques”. The project coordinator was very enthusiastic about involving the young fathers in the research and she invited me to their offices. After an initial meeting we agreed that the interviews would take place in

their building or in the space where they did training, which was also in Hackney. These interviews were carried out in the summer of 2008.

4.7.5 A too homogenous group?

My concern was that because the young fathers were accessed from the same organisations, DNA Mix and Immediate theatre, both of which are dedicated to involve young disadvantaged people in the arts, all the fathers would be very similar and I would end up with a too homogenous group. However, I think it was in fact an advantage in terms of finding a unique sample and one that differed in at least one way from young fathers that have taken part in research in the past: the high take up of education in my group. Indeed most research on young fathers, both from the UK and the US, tend to focus on young fathers who are experiencing disadvantage, poverty, low educational attainment, crime, incarceration and exclusion (Speak *et al*, 1997; Cater and Coleman, 2006; Wilkinson *et al*, 2009; Unruh *et al*, 2004; Tach and Edin, 2011; Smeeding *et al*, 2011; Reeves and Rehal, 2008; Weinman *et al*, 2002).

First, I would argue that because both DNA Mix and Immediate theatre had at their heart the idea of using the experience of being a young father, rather than just offering support, father involvement was high. Indeed, all fathers but one (Ashton) were involved in their children's lives and played, or tried to play, an active role in their upbringing. By involved I refer to men who saw or had contact with their children on a regular basis, and this could vary from living with them, to seeing or speaking with them weekly or monthly. Playing an active role refers to the idea of being involved in their children's well being: from taking an interest in their education and development, to their health and their leisure time. Thus this fulfilled the aim of making this a project about involved young fathers. Indeed, it can be argued that in order to take part on the projects offered by DNA Mix and Immediate theatre, the young men's identity as a father had to be present, as it was the experience of fatherhood that was at the core of those projects. Second, the take up of education or professional training amongst the young fathers that took part in the research was relatively high in comparison to previous research studies on young fatherhood. This, I would argue, may be related to the way in which the young fathers were recruited, which was via organisations based in the arts. Lastly, because the area in which most young fathers were recruited has a high percentage of African and Caribbean population, all the young fathers that took part in this research were from what is commonly known as "ethnic minority" backgrounds. However, as will be explored in the discussion chapter, ethnicity was not often mentioned by the young fathers. Despite this, ethnicity implicitly brings an element of originality and gives voice to a group of fathers that is under- represented (Sherriff, 2007).

4.7.6 Doing the interviews

The interviews with the young men took place in a variety of places, as mentioned earlier. The initial 5 interviews, which were young men from the DNA Mix project, were carried out both in public spaces (restaurants, cafes and the park) and in one case in the young man's house. The rest of the interviews, a total of 17, were conducted in one of the rooms of the Immediate Theatre offices, or in a room where the training with young fathers took place. There were benefits to interviewing men in a room, rather than in a public place, such as the level of noise and the privacy that it brings. However, one issue that was interesting to me was the situation in which I had to make the strategic decision to interview a young man in his own home (as mentioned earlier). In this case, I was able to meet his 9 month old son and see how he interacted with him. I also got a picture and sense of the space in which the father-mother relationship took place (the young couple were having problems at the time of the interview). As a result of this experience, I can see the benefits of interviewing young men in their homes and incorporating it in the research.

In my experience, most young fathers seemed receptive and showed a lot of sensitivity and feelings in the course of the interview. However, I accidentally attended one of the training sessions from the organisation they belonged to, which ended up being like a focus group about growing up in Hackney. I noticed that the way the young fathers spoke and behaved around each other was quite different to the way they behaved and talked to me during the interviews. They were being more boisterous, harder and gesticulated more. However, the topic itself was different, with less of a focus on being fathers and more on being young, which may have been one of the reasons to act differently. An added reason, I would argue, is being in a group situation around men of their age. For future methodological insights it may be useful to first hold focus groups and observe young fathers talking about their children around each other, and later have individual interviews. This would allow the comparison between the type of data that is elicited from using these two different types of research methods. The point would not be to verify the information provided, but rather to explore the construction of knowledge and self presentation in different contexts.

The interviews were set up to last around 1 hour, however the time varied from father to father. While the shortest interview (Mason) was around 30 minutes, the longest one lasted over 2 hours (Tim). Most of them were around the 45 minutes-1 hour mark. It was made clear from the start that participants could end the interviews themselves, but that only happened on one occasion (Jayden). I finished the interviews by asking the young men if they had something else to add, or if there was something they wanted to discuss that had not been brought up. They sometimes added a little finishing sentence, and one father asked me to tell him more about the research, which I did. I thanked them for their time and switched off the digital recorder. None of the young fathers appeared upset, so there was no need to provide

them with any support information or follow-up with a phone call, as stated in the ethics plan of the research in case of apparent distress.

I had initially envisioned contacting the young fathers at a later date in order to verify their accounts, clarify the conclusions found in the analysis of the interviews as well as check if they were comfortable with the data in the thesis being used. Unfortunately, it was not possible to revisit the data with the participants, as I fell ill shortly after and had to interrupt my thesis for a year. After this interruption I moved back home to Barcelona, which made it very difficult logistically to get in touch with the young fathers again

4.7.7 Characteristics of the sample

The main characteristics of the sample are given here, prior to the analysis chapters.

A total of 22 young fathers took part in this study, and their ages ranged from 17 to 25 years old. They became fathers between the ages of 15 and 23, and the majority (17) had 1 child only. Four fathers, Dan, Marvin Max and Tim had two children and Justin had 3 children. Thus at the time of the interview all the men were already fathers and the ages of the children varied from 2 months old to 7 years old. Most of the participants were born in the England, but three fathers were born abroad: Akram and Eric in Africa and Marvin in Barbados. At the time of the interview all the young fathers were living in different boroughs in London, mainly in Hackney (18). One father came from North West London, two lived in Tower Hamlets and one in South-East London. From the 22 fathers 5 were part of my initial pilot interviews (Dan, Greg, Justin, Kieran and Max) with took place in October-November 2007. The remaining 17 fathers were interviews in the summer of 2008.

At the start of the interviews, the young fathers were given a participant information form (see appendix 6). They were asked to provide certain data, such as employment status, education, ethnic background and number of children. Therefore, all the background data is self reported, including their ethnic background. In relation to their ethnicity, the young fathers were given the following options to describe their ethnic background: White British, White other, Black Caribbean, Black African, Other Black, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian, Chinese, Other Ethnic group.

Thus the young fathers were given the option to write down another ethnic group. In this sense, a number of fathers described themselves in their own terms, for example “mixed white & black Caribbean”, “mixed Black & Asian” or “mixed race”. While categorising ethnicity is not without issues, it can be said that all young fathers from this research were from

ethnic minority backgrounds. The table below provides more details on their background. Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Name	Age	Child(ren)	Age Children	Ethnicity
Abiola	19	1 boy	2 months	Black African
Akram	19	1 boy	4 years	Black African
Ali	17	1 girl	3 months	Black Asian
Ashton	18	1 girl	10 months	Mixed white & Black Caribbean
Dan (pilot)	19	1 boy & 1 girl	2 years & 11 months	Black African
Dominic	22	1 girl	3 years	Mixed race
Enam	24	1 boy	4 years	Black African
Eric	24	1 girl	6 months	Black African
Finley	24	1 boy	4 years	Black Caribbean
Greg	20	1 girl	3 years	Mixed Black & Asian
Jayden	20	1 boy	3 months	Black Caribbean
Justin	24	3 boys	twins 3 years & 2 years	Black Caribbean
Kieran	21	1 boy	6 months	Mixed British
Mark	23	1 boy	7 years	Black Caribbean
Marvin	20	2 girls	4 years & 6 weeks	Black Caribbean
Mason	21	1 boy	4 years	Black Caribbean
Max	23	2 boys	6 years & 3 years	Black Caribbean
Ryan	22	1 girl	10 months	Black African
Saleem	22	1 boy	2 years	Black African
Steve	25	1 boy	5 years	Black Caribbean
Tim	24	1 boy & 1 girl	3 years & 8 months	Black Caribbean
Tyler	19	1 girl	1 year	Black Caribbean

The young fathers presented varied residency patterns with the baby's mother, which are explored in detail in section 7.1, page 150. Equally, their employment trajectories were often not linear. The majority of fathers were not economically active in a continuous manner, and only two fathers worked uninterruptedly: Dan and Dominic. Other fathers had been in and out of jobs, while some were working via agencies offering temporary employment, which meant that they did not have a regular wage. Other young fathers chose to describe themselves as self-employed and these were fathers who were involved in artistic activities such as music or the media. A number of fathers studied full-time, either by being on training schemes, in further education or University

Name & age	Current Residency status	Residency history	Activity at time of birth	Current activity
Abiola 19	Non-resident	Never resident	Studying	Full-time student
Akram 19	Non-resident	Never resident	Studying	Full-time student

Ali 17	Non-resident	Never resident	Studying	Full-time student
Ashton 18	Non-resident	Never resident	Unemployed	Unemployed
Dan 19	Resident	Always resident	Working	Employed/about to start an apprenticeship
Dominic 22	Non-resident	Never resident	Working - apprenticeship	Employed full-time
Enam 24	Non-resident	Never resident	Unemployed	Self-employed
Eric 24	Non-resident	Never resident	Studying	Part-time student
Finley 24	Non-resident	Resident for 2 years. Relationships breakdown. Shared custody	Working	Self-employed
Greg 20	Non-resident	Never resident	Studying	Full-time student
Jayden 20	Non-resident	Resident for first 6 weeks. Child in foster care.	Unemployed	Unemployed
Justin 24	Non-resident	Resident for 2 years. Relationships breakdown.	Working	Employed full-time
Kieran 21	Resident	Always resident	Employed (temporary)	Employed temporary work
Mark 23	Resident	Resident for the past 3 years.	Unemployed	Looking for work
Marvin 20	Resident	Always resident	Studying	Studying
Mason 21	Non-resident	Resident for 2 years. Went to jail and partner too. Son looked after by own parents.	Unknown	Part-time student
Max 23	Non-resident	Was resident for 5 years. Recently broke up.	Working	Music artist
Ryan 22	Resident	Always resident	Student	Full-time student
Saleem 22	Resident	Always resident	Studying	Unemployed
Steve 25	Non-resident	Resident x years	Starting business	Unemployed
Tim 24	Resident	Always resident	Unemployed	Unemployed
Tyler 19	Non-resident	Never resident	Studying	Employed – temporary work

Overall, it can be said that although there were common points with regards to participants' background and experiences, there were also disparities in their personal trajectories. For example, while some fathers were at University, others had been to jail and while a minority had worked to provide for their children, others were not able to embrace economic responsibility. This means that there is a variety of situations that could be explored in the course of the study, which brought different angles to the experience of involved fatherhood.

4.8 Conclusion and introduction to the analysis chapters

This chapter has discussed a range of methodological issues related to the investigation of young men's perceptions of their role as fathers. Arguments have been put forward for the value of a qualitative approach to investigating the subject of young fatherhood. There are two aspects of qualitative research that are important for this thesis. First there is the way in which qualitative research seeks the complexity, detail and context of individuals. Secondly, qualitative research allows for the exploration of individuals' perspectives and interpretations of their realities. This is important because I want to capture the lives of young fathers, as perceived by them, in their particular social contexts. Moreover, qualitative research also allows for the voice of the researcher to be included in the research. This is in accord with the view taken on the research method used in this study, qualitative interviewing. While there are different approaches to this method, I take the view that the data resulting from the interview situation derives from the interaction between research participant and the interviewer. In this sense, the accounts of this study are taken not as direct accounts of experience. The knowledge built does not exist independently of me and is the result of a co-construction between me and the participants.

The second part of the chapter has focused on Grounded Theory, starting with an introduction to its origins and history in order to state why such an approach became so widely used. It is argued that the impact of Grounded Theory is based on the way in which it legitimized qualitative research as an approach *per se*. However, one of the issues with traditional Grounded Theory is that it had a strong positivist incline, for example in the way it viewed the researcher as a neutral gatherer of data. It is for this reason that Grounded theory has evolved throughout the years. One of the new approaches, Constructivist Grounded Theory, was adopted in this study as it fits with my world view and general approach to doing research.

The chapter then focuses the process of data analysis, starting with transcription (which is seen as the first step to analysis, not as an activity outside it). The task of coding was explored as well as the importance of bringing in the social context, so the resulting stories are not seen as independent of it. The following sections focused on the more practical aspects of doing research. First I discussed the importance on ethics in the research process, both at the point of designing the study as well as ethics in practice during fieldwork. The process of finding participants, particularly the difficulty in accessing young fathers was explained. Finally, the carrying out of the interviews was briefly explored.

Overall, the methodology and methods are appropriate for the theoretical framework explored in the previous chapter, which includes structuration theory, discourse and social capital. As explored earlier, qualitative research allows for a nuanced investigation of social processes

while interviewing allows basing those social processes under study on individual accounts. This fits in with structuration theory which places importance on the daily interactions between individuals as contributing to the makeup of the social structure. Indeed, despite being a macro theory, structuration also takes into account the micro-sphere. The micro-sphere in turn is the basis of social capital, with its emphasis on the relations between people as creating resources that can benefit not only the individual but the functioning of society. Moreover, the constructivist approach is in tune with the concept of discourse, which is important to this thesis as it is believed that the way that young fathers are portrayed and represented has an impact on their experiences of fatherhood.

The following four chapters of the thesis will be dedicated to the analysis of the interviews.

The first analysis chapter (chapter 5) starts in the same way as I started the interviews: by mapping out the young men's development from hearing the pregnancy news to the birth of the child. I decided to start at this point because it allowed me to set up the context in which the young men became fathers. For example, to see if the pregnancies had been planned or unplanned and the consequences this may have for them. The moment of birth appeared to be a turning point for the young men's experience of becoming fathers. For this reason I decided to end this chapter with the moment of birth.

Chapter 6 is based on the father child relationship, which is the core of this research. One of my aims is to investigate the types of contributions that young fathers make to their children's lives that are of non-economic nature. As was argued in the literature review chapter, economic provision is still central to perceptions of the father role. On general terms, I would argue that it was important for fathers to present themselves as trying to make positive contributions to their children's well-being. This is one of the recurrent themes of the research, which included different aspects: from caring, to spending time, playing or educating.

Chapter 7, moves on to analyse the relationship with the mother. I decided to include a chapter dedicated to this issue as it appeared central to the father role. I would argue that the way young men perceive their role as fathers is mediated by the relationship with the mother. Thus for example, when fathers have a good relationship with the mother, whether cohabiting or not, and they have relatively stable lives, whether working or in education, they seem to be able to manage their father role well.

Finally, chapter 8 first deals with an issue that came up repeatedly: that of the background of the young fathers, both in relation the neighbourhoods in which they lived and the families

they grew up in. While I was interested in this issue, I did not anticipate the importance placed on it by young fathers. They appeared to speak about their background and neighbourhoods for two reasons. First to place their biographies in a certain context, and to explain some of the turns that their lives had taken, as well as decisions they made. Secondly, to talk about the main worries that they had in relation to their children's well being and future chances. The second part of this chapter explores young fathers' experiences in relation to professional practice as well as society's reactions to their status as young fathers.

What was important to me is that there were issues that I tentatively wanted to explore, which were brought up by the young fathers without me probing. Examples of these are being at the birth, or difficulties in the relationship with the mother amongst others. This was in some way a validation that those issues were important to the young fathers themselves. Equally, other areas which were of my interest, such as housing, were not included as they did not seem important to this group of young fathers.

Finally, as mentioned earlier in chapter 4, interviews are not considered as direct representations and reports of the experiences of young fathers, but rather as their perception of the events. In this sense, these are the interpretations of young fathers' perceptions of their role, and these accounts are situated in a specific time and context.

Chapter 5 *“I was young at the time, I was quite shocked”*: Young men’s journey into fatherhood

Introduction

This chapter starts by taking the stories back to the time when the fathers were told by their girlfriends that they were pregnant. It explores the journey in which young men embark on once they learn about the pregnancy, right through the moment of birth. A central feature of the young men’s narratives is that becoming a father at a young age is described as a difficult experience to go through. For example the young men speak of not feeling ready and of their worries as to the demands that fatherhood will bring. These worries are particularly related to economic provision as well as their availability to care for their children. It can be argued that this relatively realist view may have helped ease their transition to fatherhood. Also, the majority of young men that took part in this study considered themselves *young* or *too young* to have a baby. It is in the context of ambivalence, or fear (and sometimes excitement) that the young men lived their impending fatherhood. In this sense the majority of fathers do not appear to idealise fatherhood to the extent that has been found in other research (Cater and Coleman, 2006), albeit in Cater and Coleman’s research the pregnancies were planned. This can be considered a fundamental difference between the groups of young men in each respective study. The concept of planned and unplanned pregnancies is not without problems. As Duncan *et al* (2010:11) argue,

it is assumed in the public and media discourses that all teenage pregnancies are unplanned, that all unplanned conceptions are unwanted, and that most result from ignorance if not willful immorality.

The term unplanned is used in this research in relation to the way in which the young men did not speak to me about having discussed the intention to become parents with their partners.

The chapter is divided in three sections. First, it focuses on young men’s narratives around the time when they found out their girlfriends were pregnant. This includes a discussion of the reactions that the young men had to the news of the pregnancy, including the considering of abortion. It also explores how the pregnancy is sometimes a disruption of the young men’s life plans and how they dealt with it.

The second part investigates the pregnancy news in relation to the partner and the family. It argues that when it comes to the decision making process between the young couple, there appeared to be little conflict over the actual decision, with one exception. Families were

generally supportive, maybe because many of the fathers' own mothers had been young mothers themselves. This support may have influenced the young men on two levels: going through with the pregnancy and instilling feelings of responsibility and a desire to *be there*.

The third and final part of this chapter deals with the experience of birth. Indeed, most fathers (17 out of 22) either attended the birth of at least one of their children¹² or were at the hospital (but not in the delivery room). This is in accord with wider societal trends, as being present at the birth has become the norm for fathers-to-be (Dermott, 2008). In the case of the young fathers in this research, being at the birth invoked very positive feelings. This is in contrast to the more negative, albeit transient, feelings towards the pregnancy. Being at the birth is presented by the young men as their chance to create an initial bond with their children, and it is here where its symbolic and relational significance may lie.

5.1 “*I don’t think I could accept it in my head*”: from young man to expectant young father

As seen in the introductory chapter, the young men in this study became expectant fathers between the ages of 15 and 23. At the time of conception, the majority was in a relationship with the mother of the child with varying degrees of length as well as stability. Only one child, Akram's son, was allegedly the result of a casual, one-night encounter. Although some relationships were relatively well established, the majority of first pregnancies were not reportedly ‘planned’ by the young father. Indeed, out of the 22 men that spoke about the time when they found out their girlfriend was pregnant with their first child, 20 had not actively ‘planned’ the pregnancy. This *surprise* element does not necessarily mean that there was no planning involved on the girls' side; rather it means that if there was some, the young men did not talk to me about being aware of it. Moreover, the distinction between planned and unplanned is not always clear with many pregnancies not fully planned but neither avoided. For example, in Cater and Coleman's (2006) study they considered ‘planned’ those pregnancies in which, despite knowing about contraceptive use, fate was made responsible for the potential outcome. In the case of this research, those pregnancies for which the young fathers did not talk about having negotiated or discussed with their partner having a child are considered unplanned, which as just mentioned, was all but one¹³.

It may be the unplanned nature that made the period of the pregnancy a multifaceted journey for young fathers. This journey involved a variety of issues, from considering an abortion, to looking at their readiness to embrace their role and the impact on their life plans. All these issues will be explored in this first section.

¹² Max was not at the birth of his first son but was there for the birth of his second one. Dan attended the birth of his first child, but was not there for the second as it was in the middle of the night and he had to stay home with his son.

¹³ It is important to clarify that the only father (Marvin, 23) that planned the conception of his first child had been a step dad for the past 3 years to his partner's 4 year old daughter.

5.1.1 Pregnancy news: shock and abortion

The role of men in pregnancy planning is not clear. There is some evidence that young women may instigate the planning of a pregnancy more often than men, and that men's involvement in the decision to conceive a baby is sometimes doubtful (Cater and Coleman, 2006). However, a US study looking into low-income young mothers found that it was sometimes the men who asked the women to have a child, usually shortly after getting together (Edin and Kefalas, 2005:31). Moreover, other studies have found pregnancy to be a way for young men to validate their masculinity (Kegler *et al*, 2001). This does not appear to be the case in this study, at least explicitly. Only two men Greg (20) and Enam (24), related the pregnancy to manhood. On the one hand, Greg said that it was a “*task from God... a task for me to make me into a better man*”. On the other hand, Enam (24) said the opposite “*I didn't think anything about oh, becoming a man*”. None of the other men made an explicit mention of manhood in relation to the pregnancy news. However, as it is argued later, it may be the case that young men are able to build an alternative masculine identity based on the nurturing side of being a father, as they establish a relationship with their children.

Considering that the pregnancies were reportedly unplanned, and therefore one could say unexpected, *shock* was a commonly used expression to describe how they initially felt about the news. This is in accord with previous research on the subject (Quinton *et al*, 2002, Pollock *et al*, 2005), possibly reinforcing the unplanned nature of the pregnancies.

Ok... and the first one, when you found out that she was pregnant, was it a surprise or was it planned?

Erm... it was a surprise, yeah, definitely a surprise.

How did you feel about it?

Erm... I don't know, it was a shock, the thing with me is that I find it hard to take things in straight away...

Right...

So I was going along with it.

(Max, 23. 6 & 3 years old sons, non-resident)

Related to the shock and unexpectedness, most young fathers expressed mixed feelings about the news, not rejecting it outright but being overwhelmed by it¹⁴. Coming to terms with the news of the pregnancy is often presented as a process, and the quote above by Max is representative of those feelings. Similarly, Greg said in relation to the news of the pregnancy:

I don't think I could accept it in my head. But eventually you come round to it, to say yeah we are gonna keep it.

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

¹⁴ In fact, only one young man (Ali, 17) was opposed to the pregnancy, which led to the break-up of his relationship, this is explored later in the chapter.

Young fathers' ambivalence towards the pregnancy, coupled with the reportedly unexpected nature, often led to the questioning of whether one should carry on with it. Thus the process of accepting the pregnancy, involved considering a termination immediately after finding out about the news. Feelings and moral stands around abortion were therefore discussed by the majority of the fathers as part of the process of deciding what to do in relation to the pregnancy. Adoption was not mentioned by any of the young fathers and is therefore not discussed in this study.

Right... so you weren't in a relationship with the mum? Ok so once she gets pregnant what do you?

I was young at the time, I was quite shocked... like, cos we've got this thing in my family, we shouldn't have an abortion and stuff like that so we just had to keep it... but we weren't together, she lives in Essex and I live in London.

(Akram, 19. 4 year old son, non-resident)

And when I found out she was pregnant it was like... I wanted her to have an abortion but I didn't in another way because I don't agree with them, but I believe I was too young to have a child.

(Ashton 18. 8 month old daughter, non-resident)

When talking about abortion, or 'getting rid of the baby', the primary reason given not to do it was not believing or agreeing with it, mainly on moral grounds. Other research has shown that moral, ethical and religious views have an influence on abortion practices amongst young parents (French *et al*, 2005). Moreover, research has also found that family has an influence on whether a young woman terminates the pregnancy or not (French *et al*, 2005; Tabberer *et al*, 2000). In this research, only Akram made the direct link between his belief and his family upbringing, rather than to a more abstract thought, or moral stand, as it is often done. Paradoxically, Akram's mother and siblings do not know about his child and, as far as I know, he was the only one who was in this situation. Thus family pressure may act more on the level of internalised morality, rather than on direct pressure as such.

However, it can be speculated that many of these young mens' views on abortion may be influenced by the fact that their own mothers had been young and that they could have aborted them. Moreover, some of the young men also had siblings or friends who were young parents. In this sense, the fact that their mothers, or those around them, did not choose an abortion may indicate both an acceptance of youthful pregnancy and, to an extent, a rejection of abortion. It can also be seen as a matter of preferable outcomes, where having a baby is a more desirable result from a pregnancy than a termination. In general, a good

number of young men that took part in this research considered but rejected abortion on moral grounds. Conversely, as seen in the literature review, a young man's view and reaction to the pregnancy has been found influential on a young woman's decision to take the pregnancy to term or terminate it (Evans, 2001; Paschal, 2006; Tabberer *et al*, 2000).

Another aspect of rejecting the termination of the pregnancy, or respecting the girlfriend's desire to come to term with it, was the feeling of taking responsibility. Hoggart (2012) explains that past research has shown how teenage mothers use their own moral framework in order to offer a positive representation of their actions. Thus, as she explains, "one way in which this was done was by defining risk and responsibility in ways that justified their decisions to continue with an unexpected pregnancy" (Hoggart, 2012:540). Some of the young men in this research also made use of this strategy in order to morally frame their acceptance of the pregnancy.

It was a surprise. For me, I didn't really want to be a young parent, but since I made the decision to sleep with her at that time, I thought well that's my responsibility that way; if she decides that she wants to keep the baby, then I am going to stick with her all the way.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old son, non-resident)

Yeah, it was a surprise, yeah. But I weren't... I was intrigued... but also thought about getting rid of it at first, but then I thought to myself 'No, I have got to take the responsibility, as I said, I think pregnancy is a miracle;... if I get rid of my baby, how do I know I am going to have another one?'

(Mason, 21. 4 year old son, non-resident)

Interestingly, the management of risk and the taking of responsibility take two forms. On the one hand, it is based on the decision to have had sex and it is therefore based retrospectively on a previous life choice, as seen in Abiola's quote. On the other hand, the taking of responsibility is done in relation to the actual consequence, having a baby, of the past decision of having sex. In this sense, the management of risk, and responsibility, are both done in relation to accepting a past decision as well as its present consequences.

Hoggart (2012) argues that this is a very different conception of individual risk management to that of social policy. Moreover, she also points out that teenage mothers' own conception of responsibility "formed part of an alternative moralistic framework that could be identified as another driver towards young motherhood" (Hoggart, 2012:540). The role of the father in taking up such alternative discourses of responsibility can be seen as contributing to those drivers of teenage pregnancy.

5.1.2 Pregnancy as fate

The previously discussed Social Exclusion Unit 1999 report gave three main reasons to explain the relatively high numbers of unplanned teenage pregnancy: lack of aspirations, coupled with inappropriate sex education and young people's ignorance (SEU, 1999; Carabine, 2001). As explained in the literature chapter, this has been contested by researchers such as Gale (2008). She argues that it is the lack of a significant dialogue about contraception in young relationships, coupled with low self esteem, which often leads to unplanned teenage pregnancies. The view of lack of knowledge around contraception is also contested by Duncan (2007:308), who believes that "the research evidence does not support" official accounts of those causes of teenage pregnancy.

In this study, only three young men mentioned having used contraception. This could be related to the fact that questions around contraceptions were not included in the interview schedule, therefore limiting the opportunity to bring up the subject for the young fathers. Ali, stated that he had used a condom every time he had sex with his then girlfriend, which made him doubt his paternity status. The other two were Steve and Greg.

She was actually using contraception at the time when she um 'cos... when she fell pregnant, so that was pretty shocking as well you know, because we were trying not to, we were trying to prevent that and you know, it happened but it... it was miracle, you know, because I wouldn't take any of that back now...

(Steve, 25. 5 year old son, non-resident)

Surprise, we used precautions and everything but it's just, the way things happen innit? you know, what's happened so... it was a task from god, innit? That's what I believe.

Right...

A task for me to make me into a better man, you know...

(Greg, 21. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

Both Steve and Greg appear to frame the conception of their children as fate. Steve calls it a miracle as his then partner had polycystic ovaries, which severely limited her chances of getting pregnant. Greg, on the other hand, puts the pregnancy in the hands of God, and on this occasion presents the pregnancy as a positive event in terms of giving him the chance to improve. On the one hand, it can be argued that this discursive view of pregnancies a "fate" or "meant to be" appears to be used in order to take away their responsibility of the pregnancy. Thus, in this retrospective view of events the young men portray themselves as having very little control over the conception of their child, as not even contraceptive use was enough to prevent it. That the other 18 participants did not mention having used contraception may suggest that they did not actually use it. Otherwise, it can be argued, they

would have included it as part of their narratives, and as one of the reasons that contributed to that feeling of shock. Another interpretation of the way in which the majority of young men did not mention contraception is that they actually did not take care of that aspect. Indeed research has found that young men often place contraception responsibility on the women's shoulders (Tabberer *et al*, 2000). It can be argued that it is not only what the interviewees explicitly say but also what is not said or avoided that can tell us something about their lives and realities. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the way in which this was not included as an area to be inquired about in the interview limits our knowledge about the role of contraction in these pregnancies.

5.1.3 Too young and unprepared? Young men's reflections on becoming a father

One of the common feelings that the news of the pregnancy aroused was being too young and not ready to have a child. This meant that many of the young men's reflections and feelings on the pregnancy and their (potential) impending fatherhood were considered from the perspective of age. It can be argued that these reflections are relevant for two reasons. First, being young was equated with being unprepared and not ready to take on the responsibilities that fatherhood brought. Secondly, their age-related reflection offered an understanding of what constitutes fatherhood for the young men in this study, and the tasks, responsibilities and changes that brings to one's life.

I know you said you thought you were too young; in what way?

I was too young to like... it would be in that father-perspective like... I just wasn't ready actually like to be a dad. It just wasn't me.

OK. And when you say be a dad, what aspects of being a dad?

Like for example, like now I am a dad, like I have less time for myself, less time for my friends, education wise and everything, it was just like I have got to think of three people now, not just me... the baby and the mother as well. So there's that. All of that, I just wasn't ready for it.

(Ali, 17. 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

Can you think about the time, you know, from... the time she gets pregnant what was happening then?

Well um, when she got pregnant at first, I didn't know what to do because I, I wasn't ready for a child at the time. But I lost a child before that so I wasn't prepared to not have the child.

You lost a child with someone else?

Yeah, with someone else, before that... so I wasn't prepared not to have the child, but I didn't feel I was in the right situation to have a child, like money, financial wise. Even mentally I was still a bit, a bit boisterous.

(Finley, 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

First, it can be said that such views give an indication of what this particular group of young men considered an appropriate age to become a father, which was older than they were when they heard the pregnancy news. As they present fatherhood as belonging to an older age group, this may be taken as both conforming to circulating discourses around age-appropriate parenthood and also about issues of self-identity (i.e. not relating to the role of the father).

It is possible that this is linked to the way in which a good number of the young fathers that took part in the research, despite growing up in deprived neighbourhoods, were relatively less disadvantaged and had a greater future outlook than young fathers that typically have taken part in other studies. Examples include Tyrer *et al* (2005) UK study of young fathers with a history of being in-care; Wilkinson *et al* (2009) US research on young, minority, crime-involved fathers or Cater and Coleman's (2006) investigation of planned teenage pregnancies in people from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, amongst others. For example, at the time of the interview the same number of men was in education or about to start studying, than unemployed (see table on pages 93 and 94). Besides education, many of the young men pursued artistic interests, particularly around music and theatre. The pursuing of education and artistic interests may mean that fatherhood was not part of the young men's desire for neither their medium term "*imagined future*" (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011:4), nor part of their identity (real or projected). By this I mean that they were primarily involved in other activities and were not considering being a father at that point, with all its accompanying responsibilities and life changes. In this sense the concept of socio-scapes may be applied here. Socio-scapes are mental maps of the scope of opportunities and limitations as perceived by young people and spring from deeply entrenched divisions of class, ethnicity and gender (Balls *et al*, 2000).

What is interesting is that for many of the young men in this research their perceptions of their life opportunities were broader than what is often found in studies of disadvantaged young people (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Henderson *et al*, 2007). Thus while crime and getting into trouble were part of many of these young men's biographies (as is explored in chapter 8), with a few exceptions these were not serious and could even be considered part of growing up in deprived neighbourhoods or being adolescent.

Finally, it can be argued that for young men fatherhood also constitutes a state of mind. Expressions such as "*not being ready mentally*", or the manner in which Ali felt that "*it just wasn't me*", points at the way in which young fathers equate first time fatherhood with changes to one's identity. Particularly, these changes to identity are related to becoming more settled and responsible, and also about having less time for oneself. Moreover, it can be argued that there is a further change, directly linked to that of identity, which is represented by Ali's feelings: the transition from having just your individual needs to consider to having to dedicate your time, energy and resources to someone else.

5.1.4 Pregnancy as a disruption of life plans

Another lens by which the news of the pregnancy was reflected upon was in relation to the plans that the young men had for their lives, particularly short-term ones. This particularly applied to those young men who were either in education or were considering studying, but it is not confined only to them. At the time of the interview, 7 young men were in education (either University or College) and one was about to start an apprenticeship. A further 7 men were not employed, and the remaining 7 were either in full-time or part-time work. For a number of men the pregnancy was indeed a disruption of their immediate plans, or life trajectory, as they were planning to go to University or start an apprenticeship. They dealt with this disruption mainly in two ways: either carrying on with their plans and juggling studying with fatherhood, or putting those plans on hold and concentrating on working and providing for their child.

Abiola was one of the fathers who was considering going to University prior to the conception of his baby. Although the dilemma for Abiola in relation to pursuing further education started before having his child, his doubts came back again once he learned of his impending fatherhood. Moreover, the news of the pregnancy added new stresses to Abiola's decision.

Did you think, oh maybe I shouldn't go to Uni, I should work or..?

Like I was kind of thinking... because me personally, I kind of was thinking I didn't want to go to University because of like all the debts that I could accumulate but then I was thinking that Uni is a great way to meet new people as well as developing your life, like if you want to progress in life as well and I think when the baby come, them thoughts kind of came to my head again - will I have time to look after the baby with my Uni? Will I be able to handle a job, work at the same time? But I thought to myself, eventually either way I am going to have to... I am going to need to have, to get a good job so that I can look after the baby properly and my girlfriend as well, and I see that the best way to do that is to go to Uni and get some good qualifications and then find a good job.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old son, non-resident)

Prior to the news of the pregnancy Abiola was weighing up the benefits of going to University, "meeting new people" and "developing your life", against its disadvantages, getting into debt. However, when hearing the news of the pregnancy there was one added worry: that of having enough time to juggle all the roles. These include being a young man, a student, a part-time worker and father. Being able to fulfill and balance all the roles appeared to be a key concern for the young men in this research. In relation to his role as a father, Abiola's present worries with regards to attending University was related to lack of time available for his child, as he wanted to take a part-time job as well as study. Lack of availability, due to

work or studying was a concern for other young fathers too, which may point at time as a central feature of fatherhood and key to understanding involvement. Indeed, it can be argued that if time and availability is valued by young expectant fathers, or the lack of it is seen as a stress, it may be understandable that many young men do not carry on with their education once they learn about their impending fatherhood.

Another relevant aspect of Abiola's story is how he embraces the notion of education as a way to move forward in life, which is in accord with theories of social capital. These theories see formal education as an important aspect of social mobility (Bourdieu, 1972; Coleman, 1990). Moreover, a point to notice here is that Abiola also sees University as a way to meet "*new people*", which points towards seeing higher education as bridging him to a new set of friends. The notions of bridging social capital, in which links made outside one's community are helpful in getting ahead, as opposed to bonding social capital which help people get by (Putnam, 2000), can be applied here. There were other men who also held these values in relation to education, either for their own lives as well as that of their children. The importance given to education appears to be a fundamental and continuing theme in this thesis and one to which I will return to.

For a number of men pursuing an education brought tensions between the immediate needs (for example providing for their child) and longer term goals (having a good job). These present vs. future tensions appear to be an important theme in the experience of young fatherhood. For example, going back to Abiola, he resolves the dilemma of lesser availability (as a result of studying) by stating that University will allow him to "*find a good job*" so that he can provide for his baby and partner in the future. Some young men, such as Abiola, Greg or Ali, opted for education, thus putting on hold any chance to fully provide for their children in the present (but planning to do so in the future).

Dan and Dominic, on the other hand, represent the other end of the spectrum. Dan for example, put his plans to study to be a car mechanic on hold as a result of becoming a father and wanting to provide for the family.

A garage? Oh, you want to be a mechanic?

Yeah, yeah, that's what I want to do. I'm starting college in January, I'm gonna do that 'cos erm... I've been wanting to do it for some time but... when he was born first I had to carry on working I couldn't really go to college cos I needed the money, then she was born as well so... it's been a bit quick.

(Dan, 19. 2 year old son & 11 month old daughter, resident)

Dan's scenario can be taken to be representative of the way in which pregnancy may not entail a complete break with young fathers' life plans and education. Rather, it may mean that plans are delayed or put on hold. Similarly, Dominic explained how he turned down a job in order to be closer to his daughter, who at the time he was still seeing in a contact centre due to problems with the mother.

I turned down a job opportunity as well.

Right, away from London or ..?

Yeah. It's taken me three years to get to the position I was offered when I was 19 in Glasgow. The salary I am on now, I was offered that three years ago... even though I wasn't seeing my daughter properly - I goes 'I can't, I can't be that far away' - I says 'Anything could happen'. So I rejected that job offer and I took the next one, with less pay. It was worth it...

(Dominic, 22. 3 years old daughter, non-resident)

However, one of the risks is that young fathers do not resume their education as a result of the demands that fatherhood puts on them, or simply as a result of leaving it. This would point toward the high dropout school rates amongst young fathers. Indeed, research shows that young men who become fathers are at a greater risk of not completing their education, with more than one third not completing their education as opposed to 12% of non-fathers. The point at this which the drop out varies, as do the reasons for doing so. Thus while some stop schooling because they turn to fatherhood, for those who were already disengaged from the education system fatherhood give them the final motive to leave (Kiselica, 2008:40). It is important to point out that even for those young men who did not have immediate educational or life plans, the pregnancy presented a sort of disruption. Indeed due to its reportedly unplanned nature, the young fathers from this research did not expect to become fathers when they did. Thus even when no concrete plans were set for the short term-future, becoming a young father could be perceived a potential disruption of the life course.

5.2 Partners and Families

One part of the journey that young men embarked on upon hearing the news of the pregnancy was the negotiation of the situation with their partner or mother of their baby. In the case of this group of young men, it can be said that generally there was minimal conflict amongst the couples. Another part that seemed relevant was breaking the news to their family. Most of the time this meant just the mother, as the majority of fathers did not know or have a close relationship with their own fathers.

5.2.1 Negotiating the pregnancy with the mother of their child

Most of the young fathers that spoke about the process of negotiating the pregnancy with the mother of their child presented it as pretty straightforward matter without much conflict involved. However, this does not mean that conflict did not appear at some point during the pregnancy. Indeed, a minority of young couples broke up during that time: Ali, Ashton, Dominic and Ryan. Of these, Dominic and Ryan got back together with their partners (with Dominic breaking up again shortly after the birth) while Ali and Ashton stayed apart. Of these two, Ali had contact with his child but Ashton did not.

The relatively smooth father-mother negotiation was in tune with the reaction that most young men had to the news of the pregnancy, which even though it may have involved feelings of apprehension and shock, it was relatively well received and it was not rejected outright in all but one case, Ali. Indeed, in relation to the pregnancy Ali, whose story is explored in detail later in the chapter, said:

She was like 'I am pregnant' and I wasn't ready for a kid and then it just escalated and I ended up leaving her and then going to see her once in a while and then... it's like relationship problems, innit? and I didn't want to have the kid, she did...

(Ali, 17 years old. 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

Generally, the young men in this research presented the negotiation of the conception as a process in which they jointly with their partners came to terms with the idea of the pregnancy and future parenthood. Research has found that the views of the young father have a strong influence on whether a young woman continues with the pregnancy (Tabberer *et al*, 2000). Thus, the relative good acceptance of the pregnancy by most young men in this research may be an important factor as to why their partners decided to keep the baby. However, as is discussed in the next section, there was the sense that the women had the final say in the matter or that the final decision was left them.

Yeah, we talked about it because I didn't wanna talk behind her back I wanted to talk to her, quite mature about it, talked, right? And I told her what I think, she told me what she thinks...

What did she think?

She was against... I was against abortion, she was against abortion, so we both had the same thoughts but I was just... I couldn't... I don't think I could accept it in my head. But eventually you come round to it, to say yeah we are gonna keep it, we've just have to... make sure that we are both there for her... I weren't happy but...

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

It was common for the young men in this research to present the negotiation with the mother of their child in this sequence: shock/disbelief followed by considering terminating the pregnancy, usually on both sides, and ending in an acceptance of it. It is important to notice that such situation is particular to this group of young men, and other couples in the same position may have decided on an abortion.

Therefore, discussions about the right or wrong of abortion were central to the negotiation after hearing the pregnancy news. In this sense, it may be the case that young couples reinforce each other's views on abortion. For example, Greg above said how "*I was against abortion, she was against abortion, so we both had the same thoughts*". Similarly Jayden said,

And we ... both of us, we don't believe in abortion so we just stuck with it and stuff, you know.

(Jayden, 19. 3 months old son in foster care)

Agreeing on the wrongs of abortion appeared to give the young couple a reason to carry on with the pregnancy. It may affirm that their decision to go through with it is the correct one. Finally, this may be similar to the idea of preferable outcomes mentioned before, in which going to term with the pregnancy is seen as a better outcome than having an abortion.

5.2.2 "It was down to her, it was her decision"

When talking about the discussion of the pregnancy that the young men had with their partner, there was a sense that sometimes the responsibility of the final decision was put on the young women, as the quotes below indicate.

But we sat down like two adults and um, we discussed it and what not, the pros and cons, you know, and um... I had to explain that, you know, I wasn't actually ready, you know, as a lot of fathers do, you know, but it was down to her, it was her decision. She had a polycystic ovary, she suffers from polycystic ovaries and um... she um... it was like more or less a one in a million chance for her to get pregnant.

(Steve, 25. 5 year old son, non-resident)

Because when you find out that she was pregnant, it wasn't... it was a surprise was it?

It was a surprise. For me, I didn't really want to be a young parent, but since I made the decision to sleep with her at that time, I thought well that's my responsibility that way; if she decides that she wants to keep the baby, then I am going to stick with her all the way.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old daughter, non-resident)

The issue in this phase of the pregnancy news is about how much control and say men really have when it comes to the final decision, and this is an underexplored area. The passing of responsibility on to their partners has also been found in contraceptive use (Gale, 2008) possibly as a way to avoid responsibility if a pregnancy occurs. The same may be applied to deciding the final outcome of the pregnancy. A study looking into national variations amongst teenage abortions found that overall women felt it was ultimately their decision to carry on with the pregnancy or terminate it (Lee *et al*, 2004). Thus, it could be the case that some of the young men would have agreed to a termination, not implying here that that is a more desirable outcome, had their girlfriends sought one. One risk to bear in mind is that a study on planned teenage pregnancies found that men were more likely to regret a pregnancy than women (Cater and Coleman, 2006). The greater feeling of regret experienced by young men may be an important issue with regards to young fathers' absence from their children's lives. Indeed, regret may be a contributing factor to the fragility of the father-child relationship. In the case of this research none of the fathers spoke of regretting having a baby. This may explain the sustained involvement of some of the young fathers with older children.

Thus, what happens when a young man does not want to have the baby and yet the young woman decides to see the pregnancy through? Out of the 22 young men, only in one occasion was a pregnancy reportedly rejected outright: Ali. Such rejection led to the break-up of the relationship with the mother. For another two men, Ashton and Dominic, tensions during the pregnancy led to the break- up of the relationship before the birth of the child. Out of these three only Ashton had no contact with his daughter.

Right, OK. And so when she comes in, the first thing you say to her... or one of the..?

How, how did it happen?' I was just shocked, I didn't believe her. I thought like she must have cheated on me or something - I couldn't believe it.

Right, and you told me that you didn't want it?

No.

OK and how did she react?

She didn't like it either, so we didn't talk I think for about two months while she was pregnant, and after that I called her and tried speaking to her and she wouldn't answer my calls and then she just like... and then I went round and she wouldn't open the door - her mum would shout... just stand at the door and shout at me... and then she would just close the door on me and then I'd go and try and call her, she wouldn't pick up... and I just gave up in the end. The next thing she was in hospital giving birth and I just didn't know whether I should go there, after everything, or just stay away.

(Ali, 17. 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

At 17 Ali had no parents and lived with his older brother with whom he had a good relationship but who was not portrayed as a parental figure. It can be speculated that Ali's rejection of the pregnancy and his desire to terminate it could partly be related to the lack of support he had. Indeed, one defining aspect that marks Ali away from the rest of the young men in this research is that he was the only one that had no parents or parental figures¹⁵. Parental or maternal support may be a key element in how the young father deals with the pregnancy and the idea of fatherhood, as is explored below. Moreover, the maternal grandparents have been found to have an impact on young fathers' relationship with their children, by for example discouraging their involvement (Kalil *et al*, 2005).

In the case of this research, maternal grandmothers were generally presented as helpful by the young men. For example, they often baby sat for the young couples, meaning they could have a social life or that the teenage mothers could study. In a small minority of cases, such as Ali above and also Akram, the maternal grandparents were presented as having a negative influence.

The first year it was like going well but it started getting difficult, her family started getting involved... and we started having arguments.

(Akram, 19. 4 year old son, non-resident)

While this meant that Akram went less often to see his son, once a month, 4 years after the birth he was still in regular contact with him.

Going back to Ali, another aspect of his narrative worth mentioning is how he initially thought about doing a paternity test, in order to determine whether or not he was the biological father. However, in the end he did not do it and when I asked him why he answered:

And then now, for now, like, I started having love for the baby and if I was to go there and get a blood test, and the baby isn't mine, then I would just be like... like I've named the baby, like I've slept with the baby, and it's just like... it's not my baby. That would kill me as well, so I just left it.

(Ali 17, 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

Interestingly, Ali goes from not wanting to see the baby and denying his paternity, to wanting to believe that the baby is his. The emotional attachment between father and baby appears to have a strong influence, and it could be argued even determine, father involvement. This

¹⁵ The other young father who had no parents was Tyler, however, he grew up with his grandparents who still supported him.

feeling appears to stem from Ali's increased involvement in his baby's life. The importance of biological fatherhood becomes apparent in his narrative. Ali's feeling towards the biological link is so strong he prefers to go without a test and continue with the relationship as a negative result seems too much to bear. There is shift here from his initial reaction to the pregnancy, with an outright rejection, to this point, in which he wants to hold on to his paternity status. Interestingly, physical resemblance was mentioned by both Ali and Tim, who also doubted his paternity, as reasons for believing that they were their children and thus not take a DNA test.

5.2.3 Breaking the news to the family

Once the young fathers had learned about the pregnancy, one of the next common steps was to tell the parents. In the case of the young fathers from this study, this mainly involved telling their mothers as most of them reported having either no relationship with their fathers or strained ones. Only three fathers out of the 22, Marc, Marvin and Justin had a good relationship with their own fathers. Others, such as Ashton and Steve, knew their fathers but were not close or did not have a good relationship with them. As a result of their family background, most young men only reported their mothers' reactions to the news of the pregnancy. The fathers' influence was discussed in the context of not having a father, or having a difficult relationship with them, and the impact that has had on their own experience of fatherhood.

On general terms it can be said that the announcement of the pregnancy to the families was not presented by the young fathers as creating a great deal of conflict. The reaction of the young fathers' mothers or parents was similar to that of the young men themselves: shock followed by acceptance. The shock was sometimes coupled with what the young fathers perceived as feelings of disappointment and unhappiness. However, all the fathers reported that their mother/families either offered their support or were indifferent due to the fact that they did not have a close relationship with them. None of the young fathers reported a long term negative reaction by their family to the news of the pregnancy.

OK and how did your parents react when they found out? Like...

My parents kind of... they were kind of shocked. I thought that there was a little bit of disappointment I had a child at a young age, but my mum says that it doesn't matter like, when I look after the baby and things like that, because they are all with me, you know. So yeah... she was telling me it was going to be hard and things like that, and well... it was funny hearing it from my mum though.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old daughter, non-resident)

So during this time... when you found out that she was pregnant, how was that like?

Well, I was 18 at the time so when I found out I was a bit apprehensive at first, so I was like "oh no, what am I gonna do!" it took me a while to get, used to it, but er... I eventually came round and then like, we spoke about it, everyone's families met up and spoke... on my family they were a bit... they were, they weren't too happy but there is nothing they could do, it's happened, it's happened now... you just have to deal with it and we just said we'd try and work it out, since then we've just been trying to work it out...

(Tyler, 19. 1 year old daughter, non-resident)

Support by the family right from the start of the pregnancy could be a contributing factor to young fathers' likelihood to be there for their children, although this was not explicitly stated by the young fathers. However, it may be speculated that the support offered by the young men's mothers not only encourages them to accept the pregnancy, but also makes them develop and sustain a relationship after the birth. A study of three generations of women and men who became parents during their teenage years found that

for some, the immediate family context was the major source of practical support and emotional recognition, counteracting both practical difficulties... and public messages of disapproval (Formby et al, 2008:109).

In this sense, it can be argued that the support that the family gives to young fathers may help them cope with the transition to fatherhood. It may encourage the young men in developing and cementing their relationship with their baby. This could work on two levels: with the practical support offered and also with accepting their role as fathers.

Moreover, a key aspect in these cases may be the *expectation* coming from the families that the young fathers will be there. For example, Greg spoke in the following way about breaking the news to his adoptive mother:

Right. So at first they were like "Oh god!" and then...how long did it take them to..?

It was on the same day, innit? They said, "you know what, just make sure you are there for the child" and stuff.

Is that what they said to you?

And I said, "of course I will be there, it's my child, innit?" I could never leave her, no man.

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

It could be speculated that young men may feel more obliged or encouraged to be there for their children if their own mothers are involved as grandmothers. The expectation to keep the relationship going with the child may be higher in these cases, putting added pressure on the young men.

However, the expectation to be there can turn into pressure, which can be counterproductive, as in the case of Enam below.

And tell me about the time when he was born what was happening then? Who was he living with? How was..?

When we had Eshe, cos I've got my... 'cos my background is African and African parents are very strict about with who you go out, with who you have kids with and whatever ,and when you have a baby you have a proper home, you know what I mean? like have a family home. Otherwise, have a girlfriend, get to know her, becomes your fiancée, then becomes your wife, the whole you know... how life is supposed to be structured, right? and I wouldn't say this was a mistake but it was something that happened that we were both not ready for, so it was really hard to tell my parents so when I finally plugged the courage they were supportive but it wasn't the support I needed because then I was under pressure to do more than I was used to doing I thought... I didn't think anything about oh, becoming a man 'cos my mum was always there for me and... so when the child came along I was there thinking what's going? my world's been turned upside down, but then it made me strong cos i realised that ok, I want this child I always cried about my dad not being there for me, I want to be there for my child, I want to make a difference. So because of this I did a lot of things... good things and bad things. Like I ended up going to jail for 2 months and they found out I was not involved because I was there at the time...

(Enam, 24. 4 years old boy, non-resident)

Enam starts his narrative pointing towards his ethnic background (African) and how that influences the expectations regarding, in his own words “*how life is supposed to be structured*”. Ethnic and cultural background was not often mentioned by the young fathers, as is explored in the discussion chapter, despite the fact that none of them were Caucasian. However, in this case, it appears it is important for Enam to frame his narrative under the morality that his ethnic background offered. This in turn made breaking the news of the pregnancy to his parents harder. Just like other fathers, there is an implicit sense that the pregnancy can be disappointing news to give to ones' family. However, and sometimes contrary to men's expectations, the parents were generally supportive.

In the case of Enam, he presents support in a negative fashion as he appears to be equating it with feeling pressured to take on a role that he did not feel prepared to undertake. As a result, and unlike most young men in this study, Enam's perceived pressure had negative consequences and he ended up selling drugs to pay his way through fatherhood. Enam's narrative is representative of two issues with regards to young fatherhood. First, it demonstrates all the tensions and the contradictions that go through a young man's head when hearing the news from the expectant mother. Secondly, he reflects upon the role that his own father had in his life and how that affected the way he felt about his own impending fatherhood. The influence that their own fathers, either by being absent or having a poor relationship, had on the young men's experiences of fatherhood is a recurrent issue and one that is explored in detail later in the thesis.

An interesting aspect in relation to the young fathers' experiences of breaking the news to their families was that some of the paternal grandmothers had been young mothers themselves, thus creating a sense of complicity between the young man and his mother.

In a way she was laughing to herself because she knows... she knew exactly what it was going to be like... she's been through it.

Riiight. Was she a young mum herself or..?

Yeah, young mum.

So she was ok about it?

Yeah... she wasn't like I thought she was gonna be like, I thought she was gonna knock me out really...

Really?

Yeah, but she was alright.

(Max, 23. 6 & 3 year old sons, non-resident)

My mum was like... she was like "what, you give me a grandchild!", and I was like "yeah"... she goes "didn't I tell you to put it in your pants? I said keep it in your pants" and I was "Listen mum I'm 20 now, it's different these days, you had me about 20" and she was "that was the 80s" she was trying to say I should be older to have a baby and I was like "alright".

(Tim, 24. 3 year old son & 8 month old daughter, resident)

It could be argued that it may be the case that mothers accepted the pregnancy relatively well because they themselves had gone through it. Their experience may have made them fully aware of the difficulties that one encounters as a young parent. Thus, support may have been offered outright for that exact reason. However, I am not suggesting that this is part of the "cycle of disadvantage" mentioned in the literature chapter. Indeed, most of the young fathers did not expect their mothers to have a positive reaction. This puts into questions the intergenerational transmission of a culture of teenage pregnancy advocated by the underclass

theory (Murray, 1996), and adopted by the aforementioned Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (SEU, 1999). Moreover, in relation to her study of three generations of teenage mothers McNulty (2008:118) argues that “reference to a ‘cycle’ suggests repetition of ‘the same thing’ but in fact women’s pregnancies under the age of twenty have had various meanings over time”. This point is made clear by Tim’s mother, who when faced with his son saying that she too had him young refers to the time in which this happened,” *the 80s*”.

Finally, it is important to point out that the mothers or parents’ reaction were affected by the nature of the relationship between the young parents-to-be. For example, in the case of Justin, who was cohabiting with his partner, and Marvin, who was stepfather to his girlfriend’s daughter, the parents and mother respectively took the news well. They both mentioned their families were “*very happy*” to hear the news.

One case that stood out amongst the participants was that of Akram, a 19 year old father who was born in Africa and came to England with his mother, his brother and sister as a child. Akram lived in a hostel and did not have regular contact with his family. Even though he had been a father for four years, he had not disclosed it to his mother or siblings.

For the first year it was... it wasn't easy, innit? Like being in the hospital, with having a baby ... 'cos I didn't tell my family, my family don't know...

You didn't tell them?

Yeah... I just, do it myself.

Riiight, are your parents in England or Africa?

My dad is in Africa, my mum lives here... myself and my older brother and my sister live here as well.

Ok... so you didn't tell anybody?

No...

Ok and how did you cope with it?

I just cope alright... you know what I mean like? It was hard at first but I've got friends around me, you know... 'cos my friends they all have so they tell me what to do and everything...

(Akram, 19. 4 years old son, non-resident)

Akram did not tell me why he chose not to disclose his family that he had become a father. What seems important in his narrative is that he points out that his transition to fatherhood, the first year of the baby’s life, was made harder because he did not have the support of his family. Previous research has pointed out the importance of the paternal grandmothers’ support for young fathers (Kalil *et al*, 2005). However, Akram appears to have filled the lack of family support by that of friends. This point towards the idea that young fathers can benefit from positive and supportive relationships and these are not limited to just family ones.

5.3 Being at the birth: the “magic” moment

A good number of the young fathers, a total of 16 out of 22 spoke of being at the hospital during the birth of their first child. Of these 16, 12 were in the actual delivery room, while 4 were in the hospital. Reasons not to be at the actual birth, despite being at the hospital, were: having the flu, being squeamish, falling asleep and not being called into the delivery suite when the birth was happening. These relative high numbers are in accord with the general trend in contemporary western societies of fathers attending the birth of their child (Fatherhood Institute, 2006), with 98% of fathers reportedly being at the birth (NHS, 2005). The Millenium Cohort Study in the UK (Kiernan and Smith, 2003) found that out of the 85% of couples who were living at the same address, 93% of fathers were at the birth. Out of the 15% who were not living together, half of the fathers were at the birth. This same survey found differences in birth attendance by geographical area, socio-economic background and ethnicity. Thus, fathers in the highest socio-economic group had a 91% attendance rate, while in the most disadvantaged groups it fell to 80.5%.

The transition to fatherhood is taken to be a process rather than an event (Quinton *et al*, 2002) and the moment of birth can be considered part of that process. Moreover, it is argued that “for both father and mother, the birth of their first child is usually the peak experience of their life” (Fatherhood Institute, 2008:2). The birth therefore can be considered a very important and significant part of that process, as it seems to bear particular significance in the transition to first time fatherhood.

5.3.1 “*It was amazing, it was the best day of my life*”: young men experiences of attending the birth

One of the things that became apparent when hearing and examining young fathers’ accounts of their experience of attending the birth of their child is that they invoked very different feelings to the unexpected news of the pregnancy. Being “*happy*”, having a “*good feeling*”, “*amazing*” and “*exciting*” were amongst the expressions used to describe the moment of birth. This contrasts with the moment when they learn about the pregnancy in which more (transient) negative feelings were expressed, as explored earlier in the chapter. For example, Greg and Jayden spoke in the following way about being at hospital for the birth:

Right, and then the birth happened; how was that?

Oh my dear! I was there while she was giving birth and I felt amazing, yeah. It was a big experience, I felt different after it. I felt more mature and responsible and stuff like, you know. Like it’s a big step and since me being a dad, I have loved it, every second. I haven’t regretted it once.

(Jayden, 20. 3 month old son in foster care)

What was that like?

Great...

When you first saw her held her...

Cos I was still young, of course, there was stuff going through my head, I was thinking “no it’s not ruined” .

Aha...

But already I felt a bond, already, when I looked at her I felt a bond straight away and I knew that...

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

Even though the moment of birth was a positive experience, some of the young men had feelings of ambivalence, with some saying how it felt “*unreal*” or “*weird*”. For example, in the quote from Greg above he is talking about being too young and questioning the impact of becoming a father. However, it appears that the birth and holding her daughter is a significant turning point for Greg. Similarly, Jayden spoke about feeling different after the birth, more mature and responsible. The benefits of being at the birth, or at the hospital, may be based on this effect. Research in the US has termed the perinatal period and the time around the birth the “magic moment” (Fragile Families, 2010:2), due to the way in which couples at this point are often together and positive about their future. Thus as they explain, “services to fragile families at this “magic moment” should be immediate, intense, and focused on the couple in their role as cooperative parents” (Fragile Families, 2010:2). It can thus be argued that the importance of fathers’ involvement during the birth should therefore not be underestimated.

Given the general high numbers of men being present at the birth it could be argued that it has become a social expectation. Consequently, this experience is part of the behavior that fathers to-be are expected to perform in contemporary society and it is typically seen as symbolising greater commitment to fatherhood (Dermott, 2008). In this sense, it can be argued that by being there at the birth the young men from this research are fulfilling the first task that is required, and socially expected, of them as fathers. As a result, they are presenting themselves to those around them (family, medical profession and partner) as an involved father. However, I would argue that not only are they fulfilling the role that may be expected of them they are also demonstrating a desire to *be there* from the beginning. Moreover, from the young fathers’ narratives in this research it becomes apparent that being present at the moment of birth could be taken as an important event in the establishment of the father-child relationship. Attending the birth is presented by the young fathers as creating an initial bond based around positive feelings and lasting memories¹⁶.

¹⁶ It has to be added that according to their accounts none of the births but one were difficult. The only birth that was difficult, which as reported by the young dad lasted 3 days, ended up in a caesarean section. However, and despite expressing feelings of anxiety, the moment he held his daughter was too a positive experience.

Like you never let go of that memory and I mean that, it's one of the things that... Yeah, it will definitely stay in my heart... that was the day.

(Mason, 4 year old son, non-resident)

Holding her for the first time, like looking at her, seeing my first child - that was different. I know the feeling... I can tell you the whole of that day.

(Marvin, 20. 4 year old step-daughter & 6 week old biological daughter)

Such feelings are in accord with the aforementioned research pointing out that the birth is a peak experience for first time parents.

Moreover, the moment of birth was actually given as an example of a time when it felt “good to be a dad”, which was one of areas I explicitly wanted to explore.

So another thing that I wanted to talk about is, can you think of a time when it felt good to be a dad and you felt you know, like oh..? It's nice.

I think when the baby first come [sic], when I first saw it. Like it was so small, sort of tiny... It was sort of beautiful.

So that's when you felt like..?

Yeah, that's what it felt like, yeah.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old son, non-resident)

And can you tell me of a time when you felt good to be a dad?

When he was born, when he was born, yeah. I never thought I was going to cry, but I cried.

(Mason, 21. 4 year old son, non-resident)

Moreover, the narratives surrounding the moment of birth offer men the chance to present themselves as responsible and caring, both towards the mother as well as to their newborn child. These two aspects, responsibility and caring, brings up issues of masculinity on a number of levels. Crying, and particularly the moment in which they held their baby (which was mentioned by half of the young fathers) are examples of those. Secondly, the interviews suggest that there is an element of showing protection and care towards the baby as well as the mother. For example, they describe supporting the mother through the birth or holding the baby for the first time (particularly when the mother was too tired to hold their newborn).

Yeah, she was scared so I was like - they gave the baby to me and I was like “Give me the baby, just give it to me”. They gave me the baby and

I held her, and it was a good feeling.

Yeah?

I felt happy, you know, I did feel happy.

(Ryan, 22. 10 month old daughter, resident)

It can be argued that the interview may have given the young men the chance to show their soft and gentle side and express their feelings, which is something they may not often get to do. This happened on other occasions in the course of the interview, for example when they talked about playing with their babies. Moreover, by offering these descriptions of the moment of birth, the young fathers are showing their emotional side, which has become part of the experience of contemporary fatherhood. Indeed, Dermott (2008:66) argues that

being present at the birth of a child has been frequently used as the signifier of the emergence of a new form of involved fatherhood and it is often tied to the idea of a more emotionally engaged and mature masculinity.

In this sense, the birth of the baby may be the first opportunity that young fathers have to start bonding with their children, and moreover, to start developing feelings towards them. Moreover, it can be said that in those cases in which the experience is positive, the birth may provide an encouraging setting to get close to the baby.

5.4 Conclusion

It has been argued that despite the initial shock and the reported unplanned nature of the pregnancy, young fathers generally took the news relatively well, with only one young man rejecting it outright (Ali). However, the realization that fatherhood is a difficult role to fulfill, coupled with the unplanned nature of the pregnancy, meant that most young fathers questioned whether going through with it was the right choice to make. Abortion therefore, was something that a good number of young men in this study considered. It appears that weighing up the rights and wrongs of abortion was part of the process of coming to terms with the pregnancy and the impending fatherhood. Most fathers rejected a potential termination on moral grounds. It appears also that when both the young man and the partner agreed on the “wrongness” of abortion this may reinforce the justification to take the pregnancy to term. Overall it can be argued that the young men present as having little agency over the pregnancy. For example, it is sometimes seen as fate, particularly when contraception was reportedly used. Also, in relation to the decision to keep the baby, the data seems to suggest that young fathers delegated the final decision over the pregnancy to their girlfriends.

In general terms, the men reported feeling too young and unprepared for the responsibilities

that fatherhood brings. In some cases, the pregnancy led to an altering of plans, particularly around education. The main worry for those fathers engaged in further education, or who were planning to study, was having enough time to juggle being a student with fatherhood. Amongst the men in this research, their education plans were often delayed, or slowed down, rather than completely given up. In accord with previous research (Speak *et al*, 1997) for a number of men the pregnancy was seen as a chance to grow up and become more responsible. While for some young men, becoming a father may have been a fundamental turning point for others fatherhood, gave them greater impetus and a more fundamental reason to keep on the straight and narrow, but was not necessarily the sole reason to change.

The pregnancy news were accepted relatively well by most young fathers, despite the unexpectedness and the subsequent doubts over it. This acceptance meant that overall there was little conflict with the mother when it came to taking a decision over keeping the baby or not. However, tensions existed in relation to wanting to support the partners, while not making her feel pressured and leaving the final decision in her hands. It is argued in this chapter that family acceptance of the pregnancy and the offering of support was an important part of the process of coming to terms with the pregnancy in a more positive way. Indeed, as was seen, families (mainly the mothers as most young fathers grew up in single parent households) were either supportive or indifferent. None of the mothers or families presented long-term negative attitudes towards the pregnancy. Finally, one of the relevant issues of this research, I would argue, is that most young fathers were at the hospital when their child was born, with the majority being there at the actual birth. This may have an impact on developing a stronger father-child bond and also may be indicative of wanting to be there right from the start.

Chapter 6: *I want to be there for my child, I want to make a difference*: Young fathers bringing up their children and the influences on the fathering role

It can be argued that one of the strengths of this study is that not only it explored how young fathers spoke about fatherhood on an abstract level, but it also investigated at day-to-day parenting practices. The interviews directly enquired into what the young fathers did with their children when they spent time with them. First, learning to care, or caring, was often done in the context of a relationship, and thus in this chapter it is explored with that particular focus. As Herzog *et al* (2007:244) argue “to date, relatively little is known about the parental and co-parental processes of teenage parents and less is known about teenage fatherhood”. Thus this seemed an important issue to explore and is the basis of the first section.

The second section of the chapter concentrates on the parenting activities the young men engaged in, starting with the baby phase right through the toddler years. The interviews suggest that all the young fathers, except Ashton who had never had contact with his daughter, cared for their babies, albeit with differing degrees of involvement. The chapter focuses on three areas: baby care and play, leisure time with toddlers as well as discipline and education, to see how the young fathers engage with their children and what they aim to contribute.

The third section investigates young fathers’ emotional attachment to their children and the importance put on *being there*. It first focuses on the way in which young men spoke about the emotional bond they had with their children. It then moves on to explore how young men spoke about their role as providers and the tensions and rewards it created.

6.1 Baby care: first co-parenting experiences

The majority of fathers, both resident and non-resident, spoke of the experience of looking after their babies. Caring, or learning to care for a baby, appears to be part of young men’s transition into fatherhood and the start of developing a bond with their child(ren). Just as it could be expected of older fathers, it can be said that there were significant differences in the level of practice and knowledge about baby care amongst the young men. While some had already looked after babies and felt competent and comfortable, others had none or little experience and showed doubts or insecurities. Lack of experience in caregiving practice also happened amongst a minority of the young men’s partners. In these cases the young fathers spoke of taking the lead and teaching their girlfriends about baby care. Overall what appears to stand out is the willingness of most of the young men to take up and learn about caring for their babies. This section explores young men’s fears and desire to learn, their competences and how they aim to contribute positively to their children’s lives.

6.1.1 Experienced young fathers

A small number of young fathers in this study had previous experience in looking after babies, be it younger siblings, cousins or neighbours. It can be argued that this experience put them at a relative advantage and made them feel slightly more prepared for parenthood, at least on practical terms. For this reason previous experience in baby care may be useful in dealing with the transition to parenthood as it seems to take away one potential stress. In these cases the young fathers spoke of having more experience in looking after babies than their partners. The young men took the lead and sometimes even showed their girlfriends how to do it. Tim and Dan are two of the young fathers who talked about their previous experience in baby care.

Dan was the most settled dad, cohabiting and with a full-time job since the birth of his first child. He explained how he taught his girlfriend baby care tasks in his two weeks of paternity leave.

I was doing most of the things, because my girlfriend didn't really wanna pick him up because he was just so small and she was so scared.

Was she? How old was she?

She was 17, yeah... so I was, I was changing nappies and doing everything for the first 2 weeks really. It was hard for her when I had to go back to work.

Ok, do you know why she was scared?

Because I don't think she had any experience with babies because my mum was a child minder anyway, I was around babies all the time but she weren't...

(Dan 19. 2 year old son & 11 month old daughter, resident)

When I asked Dan if he enjoyed it he answered “*Yeah I just didn't want to go back to work*”¹⁷. At the time when they became parents Dan and his girlfriend were still living with her mother. This meant, as explained by Dan, that when he went back to work, the young mum had her mother's help with caring for the baby. The support of the young mother's own mother has been found important, particularly in offering help around the time of the birth (Tabberer *et al*, 2000). However, as time passes, the role of a male partner becomes a central source of support as research shows that the involvement of the maternal grandmother decreases (Reeves and Rehal, 2008). Moreover, there are also cases in which the maternal grandmother is not available, when for example she lives far away. In these cases, the support of the young man was essential in helping the young mother with the transition to parenthood. For example Tim, who was the eldest of five brothers and sisters, spoke of having previous knowledge of looking after babies.

¹⁷ Interestingly, this couple has gone on to take on very traditional gender roles. He works full-time and she looks after the children, going to college 1 day a week. When asked if he cooks, he says he doesn't as his girlfriend doesn't let him, because she is very house-proud. They now have a daughter also and Dan appears to have a less hands-on approach than with his son.

I've baby sat loads of people... so you know it's one of those things when you have a next door neighbour and your mum and the next door neighbour are going out partying or to a wine bar together, you know you can look after the next door neighbour's kids because you are the oldest one. So the thing is I'd be looking after a baby, looking after a 2 year old at the same time when I was about 16, 15... you know what I mean?

(Tim, 23. 3 year old son & 8 month old daughter, resident)

Tim's experience in looking after his siblings was an important element in dealing with his girlfriend's difficulties with looking after their two children aged 3 years and 8 months. Tim's girlfriend, Shelly, reportedly had post-natal depression, which meant that she found it hard to cope with caring for two young children. Tim explained, for example that they used to co-sleep with their baby daughter because Shelly thought it was more comfortable to breastfeed at night. However, a few months later Shelly wanted to put her in the cot, and the baby was not reacting well. Tim said that he warned Shelly about how this could happen.

I told Shelly, it's gonna very, very hard for you to her out to the cot, watch what'll happen... she tried to do it, she couldn't hack it, so much so she had to disappear to her sisters for a couple of days and let me do it.

(Tim, 23. 3 year old son & 8 month old daughter, resident)

It can be argued that the role of the father in supporting their partner in the transition to parenthood is not often acknowledged in research on co-parenting among young couples. However, "the literature on fatherhood in general one factor consistently linked to fathers' involvement is mothers' support for fathers' parenting" (Herzog *et al*, 2007:244). It could be expected that fathers exert the same positive influence on mothers, and thus fathers' support may be an important aspect in building a strong co-parenting dynamic.

The potential role of young fathers as supporters of their partners is possibly neglected because they are not often seen under that light. Indeed, as Reeves and Rehal (2008:11) argue "dominant discourses of young men do not often present them in a caring role". However, it may be argued that given the right circumstances, or need, the young fathers can feel empowered to take on that role and even take the lead sometimes. In relation to young fathers, experiences such as those of Dan and Tim, put into question stereotypical images of them as uninvolved. Indeed, as will be seen in the sections below, whether they had experience or not, young fathers in this research tried to care for their babies.

6.1.2 Masculinity, partners and insecurities

For those fathers who had none or little experience looking after babies, caregiving was generally presented as a learning process, one in which both active engagement and support was needed. Some of the young men showed insecurities around baby care due to their lack of experience. One of the issues with insecurities is that they may not be openly communicated with the partner. Such situation can be counterproductive for the father-baby relationship, as well as for the father-mother relationship. Indeed, different expectations between young men and women with regards to the level of involvement on the fathers' side can lead to conflict (Bunting and McAuley, 2004). The quote by Jayden below is very representative of those feelings. Jayden was a father to a 3 month old boy who had been put into care when the baby was 6 weeks old. He did not want to show his girlfriend that he felt inadequate as he thought that this could be counter-productive for the image she would create of him as a father.

I was just nervous. I just knew... and stuff, but I didn't want to tell her I was nervous. I didn't want her to think different of me.

So... who didn't you want to tell?

My girlfriend, yeah. I didn't want her to think different of me. I didn't want her to say stuff like "Oh, you are not a man!" So I kicked it in, I was... 'I'll do it' and stuff; it was kind of hard but as the months went on, it just got easy.

(Jayden, 20. 3 month old son, non-resident)

I would argue that the main problem in these cases is that if the father does not communicate his insecurities and asks for help, this can lead to a gradual disengagement on his side. This situation can potentially create a self-fulfilling cycle by which the young father doesn't feel confident and hides his insecurities. As a result, he does not engage with the baby or child. The young mother may perceive this as disinterest on the young man's side, rather than insecurity. This could then create tensions between the young parents, with the man feeling further insecurities and the young woman's view of him as disinterested being reinforced. An interesting point is that Jayden places great importance on his girlfriend's view of him as a father. This can be taken as representing how important the influence of the mother is in young fathers' perceptions of their parenting role.

It can be argued that the pressure Jayden feels to perform as a father is influenced by a masculinity discourse (Connell, 1995), as symbolised by his use of the phrase "*Oh, you are not a man*". Indeed, Jayden frames his insecurities in his ability to perform caring tasks, not in relation to the fatherhood role generally by saying for example "*Oh, you are not a good enough father!*", but he chooses to refer to issues of masculinity. This, I would argue, is rather paradoxical as caring tasks are traditionally related to the role of the mother. Overall, these narratives suggest that young fathers are not conforming to stereotypical images of young fatherhood and are trying their best to be involved.

Finally, another interesting aspect of Jayden's attitude is that he shows a great degree of self-reflection and presents himself as an active agent who is able to take control of his situation. He is therefore maneuvering around the structural difficulties that as young father one can encounter. In this case these difficulties related to his insecurity at looking after babies. However, not all men showed the same degree of determination and agency. For example, Ali, who was 17 and had a 3 month old daughter, was one of the fathers who showed greater insecurities towards caring for his baby, and it was not clear from the interview whether these were spoken about with the mother.

OK. So before you said you don't change her, you never have done.

No.

Is there a reason why..?

I just don't know how. She's like... it's difficult... I see her doing a lot and then it's just like, I'd try it but it just wouldn't work.

Why don't you feel like..?

Yeah I just feel like I can't do it - I don't know. It's just that I have stopped... like I could take off... I could put her in a nappy after she has been cleaned, it's just like taking it off and then wiping her... and like bathing her as well - I can't bath her - I always let her wash her.

Why not?

It's just something I can't do.

Do you feel like... are you scared?

I don't know if it's that. I am not scared but I am scared and it's just like... I don't know, if anything happens to the baby, I don't know, it's going to come down to me, or she gets sick or like she gets ill, I don't want it to come back to me.

(Ali, 17. 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

It is important to point out that Ali's case stands out for a variety of reasons. As explained in chapter 5 (page 112), he had no parents and lived with his older brother and was the only father to reject the pregnancy outright up until a month after the baby was born. At the time of the interview he was still coming to terms with fatherhood, having initially doubted his biological paternity status. Moreover, he was working out the type of relationship he had with the mother of his daughter, who he did not want to be romantically involved with. Added to this, all the interactions took place under her parents' roof, and Ali spoke of feeling uncomfortable there. For example, he spoke about how he avoided being in the same room as the maternal grandmother. Research shows that the young mother's residency affects paternal involvement: when the teenage mother co-resides with her own mother the father involvement is lower (Kalil *et al*, 2005). In this research, another young man's (Akram) visits to his child were affected by the way in which he did not get on with the maternal grandparents. He believed they did not like him and thus visits to see his son had become less frequent. None of the other fathers spoke of similar experiences to these; however most of the mothers were living independently.

Unlike Jayden, Ali demonstrates a passive and defeatist attitude using expressions such as “*I’d try it but it just wouldn’t work*”. He is ambivalent as to his capabilities as a father, as symbolized by the expression “*I am not scared but I am scared*”. He finally concludes explaining his fear of doing certain caring tasks and of being scared of taking responsibility for his daughter’s well-being (in a hypothetical scenario in which he somehow harms the baby). It can be argued that Ali does not appear to have a clear image of his role(s) as father, not intending to provide financially for at least the next two years¹⁸, neither feeling he can fully look after her (despite getting involved in some tasks such as feeding or playing). However, another explanation may be that when young fathers are ambivalent towards the baby, the ambivalence spills over their role as father and the responsibilities they are willing to take. However, what is interesting is that at no point does Ali display any rejection of this role based on his gender and neither did any of the other young fathers. Indeed, none of the fathers in this study openly spoke about not wanting to do certain caring tasks (i.e. changing nappies or feeding the baby) because they considered those as being part of the women’s realm. In this sense, the men in this research did not seem to adhere to notions surrounding gender division of caring tasks, at least while the babies were very young and when it came to particular tasks. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to mention that the taking of responsibility for the baby often fell on the young women. For example, it was more often the women who stopped their education, or went part-time with their studies, in order to look after the baby. It can be argued that both the division of caring tasks as well as the expectation that both young parents have of each other’s parenting roles seem to be influential on young fathers. Indeed, it seems to affect the quality of the father-mother relationship, which in turn seems to affect the type and amount of caring that young fathers feel they can do.

6.1.3 Co-parenting and maternal gatekeeping

Young mothers and fathers often gave each other support when they encountered difficulties caring for their babies. However, co-parenting was not always a harmonious experience, and it sometimes created tensions between the young father and mother. It is argued that one of the deterrents to father involvement is the father-mother dynamic in relation to baby care. As Herzog *et al* (2007:244) argue “in particular, fathers who perceive mothers as less supportive of their parental roles also display lower levels of parental involvement”. In this research, this was one of the key areas that young men spoke about in relation to their transition to fatherhood.

For example, in the case of Justin (24), he claimed that one of the hardest parts of being a new dad to twin sons was his partner’s reaction when he needed help from her.

¹⁸ Ali was doing a plumbing course and getting £30 per week EMA money. He expressed no intention to get a job and referred to his ex-girlfriend’s economic situation by saying “she needs to find a way to sustain herself”, and complaining she had not yet applied for her benefits. Her father was currently supporting the baby, which created tensions in the maternal grandparents’ household.

Even though at some points I wasn't working, I mean, there are certain fathers that are there and they are around the house all the time, participate nothing with the children, they don't really do it... but me, I would make a bottle and change nappies, everything.

Ok.

Certain things I'd ask her, 'cos I didn't know everything and I know she wouldn't like that, she would be sarcastic, like saying I should know.

Right, I see what you mean... and that didn't make you feel...

It didn't make me feel that good. For example when the milk has to be made at first I didn't know how many ounces you've gotta put, so I'd ask and I would get always sarcastic kind of feedback when she knew. But for me it was new, I think 'cos she'd looked after her sister she'd been through that before but for me, I never had to look after babies...

Like you'd never looked after kids.

These things used to get me down.

(Justin, 24. 3 year old twin sons & 2 year old son)

Justin draws upon fatherhood discourses of providing and caring in order to construct and present a view of himself as a father that is opposed to those men that “*participate nothing with the children*”, giving examples of tasks he got involved in. Moreover, he offers a view of himself as an inexperienced father but one who tried, which appears to be common amongst the young men in this research. In relation to his partner, her attitude seems to affect Justin's feelings towards his competence as a father. The situation described by Justin resembles previous research with young fathers which found that the perception of the fatherhood role on the women's side is an essential part of father involvement (Kalil *et al*, 2005).

Easterbrooks *et al* (2007) argue that there are several reasons why mothers influence young fathers' parenting. One of them is the fact that men often rely on mothers for support. This was seen in the quote above, by Justin. Indeed, just like other fathers in this study, as well as in previous research, he sees his partner as knowledgeable about childcare and therefore as a source of potential support. It can be argued that if girlfriends' expectations of the ability of their partner over baby care are not matched by what the young fathers can actually do, this can create tensions. If such tensions are not dealt with and resolved they can lead to relationship problems and the eventual break-up.

Another reason for the influence of mothers on fathers' parenting given by Easterbrooks *et al* (2007) is the gatekeeper role they can adopt. There were some fathers, just like Justin above, that felt discouraged to take on an active fathering role. For example, Ryan, who was cohabiting with his girlfriend in what can be considered a conflictive relationship, spoke in the following way about doing caring activities around his partner.

Like obviously I like to play with my daughter, I'll probably have some fun with her - even if it gets messy, she will still get fed, you know. But obviously the way I'm about to do stuff isn't the way she would do it, innit?

Right.

And because I'm not doing it the way she does it, she's not happy with it. She says she's not comfortable with me doing it.

Right, I see.

Which she'll have her sister do it, she'll have her mum do it, but then...

Not you. How does that make you feel?

It makes me feel angry, but what can I say? Like I get frustrated, I just phone my mother and tell her that...

(Ryan, 22. 10 month old daughter, resident)

On a first look, this interview excerpt appears to point towards a difference in parenting styles and how that can be a source of conflict and something that the young couples have to work through. However, this excerpt can too be seen representative of maternal gatekeeping, which influences the young father's engagement with his child. The danger that learning to co-parent, and the power struggles resulting from it, pose for fathers is that they give up taking care of their babies. This could lead to disengagement on their side and an eventual distancing if the relationship breaks up. Indeed, as Florsheim *et al* (1999:178) argue

adolescent fathers are less interpersonally mature than adult parents. That is, they have not yet developed the skills to negotiate interpersonal conflict associated with parenting

Indeed, one aspect of family dynamics is the way in which fathers and mothers co-parent, and this was one of the issues raised in the course of the interviews. One of the focuses was the conflict that sprung between the young men and their partners as a result of parenthood. For example, Finley spoke of his need to assert himself in his role as his girlfriend had more experience than him in looking after children.

So I had... certain times... assert myself to do things, so a lot of the time as well when the men don't do nothing... 'cos when a baby's born a woman's so much like 'Ah, this is my baby, it's come out' - well I can understand that because it's grown inside of her, and they just wanna protect it and look after it.

(Finley, 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

It is important to point out that at the time of the interview both Ryan and Finley had broken up with their partners; therefore they were re-visiting their past with that experience on their shoulders. Despite this, what these quotes suggest is that there may be power struggles

between the young men and women, which are reflected in the way they help each other at the start of their journey into parenthood. Indeed, the transition to parenthood is a difficult time for any couple, however; it can be argued that it is even harder for young couples. Due to their age, young parents are dealing with an array of issues, sometimes related to their fast-track transition into parenthood. For example, concerns around finishing education or looking for employment and providing for their children, dealing with family or society's reactions to their pregnancy are all aspects of young parenthood. Added to these, there is the simple fact of being young and having to re-adjust and give up the freedom that often comes with being that age. On top of this, those parents that stay together, or at least parent together, have to learn how to deal with being parents in relation to one another.

6.2 Young men fathering: caring, playing and educating

Given their difficulties to fully support their children economically, it appears that one of the ways in which the young fathers felt they could make a contribution was by being involved, rather than just present, in their children's lives. What this means is that the young fathers spoke about engaging with their children in an active way, a way that went beyond simply visiting or being around them. Indeed, the data suggests that all the young men who had a relationship with their child aimed to contribute something positive to their lives. There were three aspects that seemed central to the father role: care, play and education. Overall, it can be argued that there was a perceived desire to better their children's lives emanating from the interviewees. In this way, this an example of one of the overall aims of the research: to concentrate on the young fathers' strengths rather than their weaknesses (Stein, 1997). Stories of active parenting can help offer a more neutral portrayal of young fatherhood.

6.2.1 Baby care: a chance for bonding

Contemporary understandings of care-oriented masculinities and discourses of "involved fatherhood" have led to a greater emphasis on men, too, "being there" for their children in more emotional ways which have been previously more closely associated with women (Miller, 2011:32).

It can be argued that one of the central features of contemporary fatherhood is the "performing of emotion", an expression used by Dermott (2008:64) and adopted in this study. Indeed, feeling emotionally close to one's child may be one of the keys to understanding why some young fathers are able to *be there* for their children, while others are not. Finley, as will be seen in chapter 8, explained the emotional deficit that he experienced during his childhood, specifically saying that "*his father showed them no emotion, no love*", which motivated him to do things differently. One area in which emotion was openly expressed by the young fathers is in relation to the baby phase, and the mentioning of *bonding* and *love* was not uncommon.

The interviews suggest that moments spent with their babies give the young men the chance to be caring and gentle. This is something that they may not get the opportunity to do given the environments most of them lived in, which is explored in chapter 8.

The importance of routine caring tasks cannot be underestimated as they appear to greatly contribute to the father-child emotional bond. Baby play also contributed to building a relationship, even though it was seen not as an exciting activity, specially compared to when the babies grow into the toddler years.

We were just playing, you know... obviously cos she was young at that time, so I was just comforting her... like changed her when she needs, me and my girlfriend would take turns, change her... spend time together you know? Just bond and... They can't really do much, can they? Just like... crying, pick them up all the time...yeah.

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

Yeah, play... I mean when he was young, I mean you didn't have to do much apart from feed him, you know, and care for him all day, you know, just show him that he's loved.

(Steve, 25. 5 years old son, non-resident)

While the baby phase was often described by the young parents as not being particularly exciting or interactive, it was often related to the experience of building a bond with one's baby. Caring and playing with their babies was presented as an important part of developing their role as first time fathers. It can be argued that the importance may partly lay in the chance it gives young fathers to perform emotion, while holding on to their masculine identity. Indeed, as Dermott (2008:66) argues,

Emotionality towards your own children does not seem to be loaded with negative connotations of emasculation, perhaps because it is about the targeted expression of emotion rather than a more general heightening of it.

She explains that new fatherhood may offer men a legitimate way to perform emotion, because it is linked to procreation, which in turn is seen as a symbol of heterosexuality. Dermott's argument is that unlike the more general "new man" discourses, which may have more feminine connotations, fatherhood is stripped of those. Dermott (2008:66) further argues that fatherhood offers the possibility to embrace "a positive masculinity which moves away from reasserting the male dominance inherent in the idea of new lads". In this sense, fatherhood may give young men a legitimate reason for change, such as moving away from

crime or drug taking. For example, as will be seen in chapter 8, young fathers spoke of having to leave certain friendships behind when they became fathers. Moreover, the performing of emotion with their babies, through play and care, and through being gentle and caring, is another example of how these young fathers were actively consuming the discourses of *new fatherhood*.

Another aspect of the emotional relationship is the simplicity and serenity of the accounts, particularly when contrasted with other passages of the young men's lives. Thus, it may be argued that caring and playing is something positive that young fathers can contribute, which may counteract the difficulties they experience in other areas.

The importance of engaging in baby care and play is that it may help create a long lasting father-child bond. As was explained in the literature chapter and in chapter 5, the birth is seen as an important event in creating the father-child bond in men's transition to fatherhood. In fact it has been suggested that this a key point which marks father involvement, or disengagement (Garfinkel *et al*, 2001). However, research among low-income fathers suggests that "the first year of a child's life presents a centrally important time for cementing an unmarried fathers' engagement in parenting" (Kalil *et al*, 2005:208). This means that even if fathers were not involved at the time of the birth there is still an opportunity to start building a bond. And this opportunity arises from being involved with the baby. For example Ali, as explained in chapter 5, was the only father who openly rejected the pregnancy and was not at the birth as a result. However, a month after his daughter was born he decided to meet her and at the time of the interview, he had been visiting her frequently. He spoke to me of feeling a bond and feeling love.

OK and you talked about love for your baby: when did that first hit you?

Do you remember at all when it hit you?

No... I was thinking... You see that's one of the things like I spent time with the baby, I didn't know when it started because... I don't know whether it was the first time when I took a picture of the baby or there was afterwards, when she let me name the baby, and or when I went shopping with the baby, carrying the baby, feeding the baby, just anything that gives you that feeling.

(Ali, 17. 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

Thus routine tasks with the baby should not be understated as an important aspect in establishing the father-child relationship. Performing those tasks may be one of the first chances that the fathers have to bond with their babies. Thus while big moments, such as being at the birth

or choosing the baby's name, are important, they may not solely determine the father-child relationship. Indeed, it appears there are other opportunities and second chances for young fathers. This may be vital, given some of the situations that young fathers find themselves in, such as experiencing a higher likelihood of depression (Quinlivan and Condon, 2005), which can potentially stall their chance of being an involved father. For example, one of the men in this research, Kieran, experienced depression after the birth, which led him to drink and not pull his weight when it came to looking after his son. Eventually, he managed to get over his feeling of depression and isolation. I asked him what changed in his life after he stopped drinking.

The only different thing is that, obviously me and Ryan we've bonded a bit more, like he's a happy baby you know what I mean? and I love it, we've bonded more.

How did you start bonding with Ryan?

Make him laugh, feeding him, change his nappy and just make him laugh...

(Kieran, 21. 6 month old son, resident)

Thus it can be argued that young fathers' initial feelings towards their babies are not static. The relationship can change even when there is an initial negative reaction, or a difficulty bonding with the baby. Some of the young men's experiences demonstrate the changing nature of their relationships with their newborns and an evolution in accepting and coming to terms with fatherhood.

6.2.2 Fathers and play: gendered ways of playing

To date, there is no research that specifically tackled the issue of young fathers and play, and how they engage with their children during leisure time. Play was one of the aspects of the one-to-one relationship between the father and the child that I was interested in. Dermott (2008:58) argues that

playing with children has often been claimed as one of men's main contributions to parenting; the activity which holds a special place within the remit of fathering and marks out contemporary fathering from mothering.

During the course of the interviews, many of the young men spoke of *playing* with their baby or child suggesting this was an important aspect of the father-child relationship. It thus reinforced my interest in this particular aspect of the role adopted by the young men. In the literature on fatherhood however leisure time with children is often presented as a second-class activity, with more importance put on more caring and practical activities. Research

has counteracted such views and showed the value of leisure for the family (Jenkins and Lyons, 2006). In relation to the young fathers in this research there were two aspects of playing and leisure that appeared significant: gendered interactions as well as conflating leisure with education.

When it comes to gender, it is argued that the portrayal of leisure engagement of mothers and fathers is often highly gendered (Bretherton *et al*, 2005). When I asked the young fathers how they felt about having a boy or girl, most participants showed preference for having a boy. Generally, boys were considered easier to bond with, relate to, and look after. Girls were believed to be closer to their mothers. Concerns were shown by the young fathers as to having to be more protective of a daughter as she grows up, adding stress to the fathering role. But one strong aspect of their preference for a boy was based around the idea that boys are more active and that they like playing sports generally. Many of the young fathers that had baby boys felt excited at the prospect of showing their sons how to play sports. Those fathers whose sons were a little older could give examples of those types of interactions. It can be argued that this was one of the areas in which the masculine identity of young fathers was most felt, as their narratives were generally highly gendered. Jayden's quote sums up the feeling that a good number of men had in relation to the gender of their child(ren):

A baby girl, they are more of a mummy's girl and stuff and they like playing with dollies and stuff like that, but with a boy, you bond with them more, you play football with them, you play fighting and that.

(Jayden, 19. 3 month old son, non-resident)

What was clear from the narratives that the young men constructed around playing with or relating to their children is that there was a strong gender component. In turn, by taking up discourses of what young boys or young girls like, young fathers may be contributing to keeping the *status quo* in relation to gender appropriate ways of playing. In this sense, it can be argued that they may be perpetuating gender stereotypes.

Moreover, there is another interesting aspect in Jayden's quote: the belief that a daughter is "more of a mummy's girl". This was mentioned by other men, such as Tyler.

But as it's a girl, they are gonna have more of a closer relationship with the mum...

(Tyler, 19. 1 year old daughter, non-resident)

One of the issues around this gender divide and the idea that girls are closer to their mothers is that it may influence the relationship between fathers and daughters. Indeed, such beliefs may create a pre-disposition to be less close to a daughter. In a review of the literature on the influence on low-income fathers on children, Carlson and Magnuson (2011:100) found that “some (but not all) studies show that fathers are more involved with sons than with daughters, particularly at older ages”. However, they also point out that difference in involvement may depend on the activity done, as some activities are more gendered than others. What would seem relevant to me is that gender stereotypes can influence the fathers’ expectations as to what girls like, ruling out some activities over others. Such gendered expectations may in turn reduce the opportunities for greater father involvement, and father-daughter closeness as well as longer-term engagement.

Despite these gendered views, what was important to note is that in this study, some fathers that had daughters reported playing with them in what could be called ‘feminized’ ways. For example, they played with Barbie or in their dolls’ houses. Marvin and Greg are two of the fathers who had daughters who spoke about their one-to-one leisure interaction.

What do you play?

If she’s got a toy, then I’ll play with her toy. She’s got a Barbie, she loves Barbie, anything that’s pink, Barbie... she loves playing with her. I’ll play with her and her Barbies... I bought her a trampoline the other day, I bought her a trampoline. She loves to draw.

(Marvin, 20. 4 year old step-daughter & 6 week old biological daughter, resident)

So I go and get her from nursery, we come home, I’ll make her dinner or something, first, obviously while dinner is cooking we’ll read books, play in the house in her room she’s got a Barbie house...

Ok.

So she’ll make me food in there, pretend food obviously...

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

This may be representative of the way in which fathers, young or otherwise, can also engage in play with their daughters that move away from gendered discourses and the expectations such discourses bring. It may too put into question the real divide that exists, at least during the toddler years, between relating to boys and girls. Thus maybe more examples are needed in order to break down gender barriers and the way that fathers think about their engagement with their children. This is particularly important if, as research suggests (Carlson and Magnuson, 2011) there may be a relation between the gender of the child and father involvement in the longer term. However, it is argued by Kay (2006:149) that

in fatherhood, men are increasingly confronting the collision of the traditional masculine provider with the traditional feminine nurturer. Engaging with their children through leisure is emerging as a prominent strategy.

I would argue that this can be applied to young fathers, with the majority speaking of play and leisure as something they did with their children. And it can be added that for young fathers with sons, engaging in play was one of the ways in which they could perform their masculinity (Miller, 2011) in contrast to other more 'traditional feminine' nurturing tasks they sometimes took up. Thus sports, play fighting and computer games were some of the games mentioned by young fathers with sons.

I'll play with him. Sometimes we'll play fight. Because he's a little boy he likes the contact. He likes boxing, and I always loved boxing as a child, so teach him how to box and he's got a good little style going now, yeah, he's got a good little style going, I teach him how to box and then um... or we'll play Playstation or we'll do reading or like I'll come in and he's doing his learning and I'm like "Oh come and do some letters" and he'll write his name and...I teach him everything.

(Finley, 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

OK, so you are more into the physical..?

Yeah, sports. But I do read to him and that as well, we take that in turns, but I am more like into the sports and that - teaching him that. We will watch football together now, at this age we will watch football... I have been doing it since he was young actually, watching football. When he was a baby, even though he didn't understand it, I would sit down and I'd watch a football match and he will be just sitting down watching it with me.

(Saleem, 2. 4 year old son, non-resident)

It can be argued that this type of play may actually be a positive aspect of fathering for young men. It can be speculated that young fathers may feel they can make a particular contribution to their children's lives, particular because it is based on masculine traits¹⁹. It can even be seen as an area in which the young father may feel greater control over and less competition with the mother. In contrast with caring for their children, when it came to playing and leisure time, none of the young fathers spoke of asking the mothers for advice on how to do it. Neither there was conflict over this particular aspect of parenting. What transpired from the interviews was that this was a rewarding and enjoyable activity, and one that men felt in control of.

¹⁹ This it not to imply that women cannot play and interact with their children in such a way.

Overall, it can be argued that play was an important part of the father-child relationship and it may be a central feature of fathering. Thus, as explained by Kay (2009:1),

contemporary fathers use sport and leisure to engage with their sons and daughters, achieve emotional closeness and fulfill their expectations of what it means to be a 'good father'.

However, in the case of these young men there was also a strong educational role that they took up. Indeed, as seen in the quotes above, it appears that the young fathers needed to balance their accounts of playing and having fun with doing educational activities. Therefore, the men are projecting an image of themselves as fathers that go beyond playmate and include the role of educator too. The next section will deal with the issue of discipline and education in the role adopted by the young men in this research.

6.2.3 Discipline and education

It was explained in the literature review that Gavin *et al* (2002:267) found five aspects of father involvement present in all cultures (see page 27). One of them was “formation” and it included the activities of discipline and education. Both disciplining and educating their children were mentioned by the young fathers as part of the responsibilities they felt in their role. It is argued that discipline, together with positive interaction such as play, is part of high quality father-child relationships. In fact “research suggests that... positive engagement is most effective when coupled with appropriate control and discipline” (Carson and Magnuson, 2011:98). When it came to this research, two issues stood out: the way in which discipline was one of the hard, albeit necessary, parts of parenting as well as the importance of educating the children. It can be argued that both these parenting activities are based around wanting to improve their children’s future well being and life chances and are related to ideas of social capital, discussed later in chapter 8.

Part of the difficulty of disciplining was related to instilling discipline while being gentle and caring at the same time. It was a balancing act that was not always easy to perform.

And what is the most difficult part of being a dad? what would you say it is? Obviously, like... you have to balance like the fun and the discipline, and it's pretty... that's why I think, 'cos if I'm disciplining her too much for some little things sometimes, sometimes you let things go with kids 'cos they don't, they don't remember all the time, innit? If you get every single thing they are going to grow up to rebel and stuff "you bullied me when I was young"... you have to balance the fun and the discipline.

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

It's the way we Africans deal with disciplining the child, by calming them down after...

It's the African way you said?

Yeah, to discipline your children and like after, yeah? you don't you make them feel... basically... I don't know how to put it, like you discipline your children but at the end... after, after you should show them love... so they won't feel like you hate them or something...

(Akram, 19. 4 year old son, non-resident)

There were different strategies that young fathers used in order to discipline their children while being gentle and loving. It is in this context that some of the young fathers brought up their ethnic background. Particularly, some of the fathers of African background spoke of the cultural influence on that aspect of parenting. It can be argued that the way the young fathers spoke about discipline is indicative of their commitment to their children. Indeed it denotes an engagement with their fathering role and as a result of engagement with their children's upbringing. I would argue this can be taken as sign of maturity, and a demonstration that young fathers are capable of taking on the responsibility of bringing up their children given the right circumstances.

In the same way in which young fathers felt they had to balance the fun and the discipline, they felt they had to balance play time with educational activities, as mentioned before. Reading was a central activity, with half of the young fathers mentioning that they read to and with their children.

I try and educate her, I read to her a lot.

You do?

Yeah, a lot. She loves reading, she reads to me now, you know.

No way?!

Yeah, man... it's not fluent, she doesn't know what she is saying but she is reading to me, that's the whole point, it's in hear head, she wants to read.

(Greg, 20, 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

Yeah, I do reading with him, especially when I've got him over the weekend. When I've got him over the weekend I have it down to... I have a system, I have it down to a system. You can play Playstation for an hour as long as you're going to read your book for an hour.

(Finley 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

One aspect of reading is that it suggests young fathers had sensibility towards their children's upbringing and took on the responsibility of educating them. It is also presented as one of the enjoyable parts of parenting, possibly due to the fact that it is didactic and productive. By this I mean that when they educate their children, they can see the impact that they are having by seeing the children's development.

Young fathers' active involvement in education is indicative of the caring role that they can take, which go beyond the practical and playful side. In fact, it is argued by Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010:481) that there is a link between these activities. As they explain,

the more involved a father is in daily care with his child, the more likely he is to be involved in supportive activities such as affection, praise and reading and in disciplining activities.

In this sense, it can be suggested that all fathering activities go hand-in-hand and influence each other. Thus, those fathers who were involved tended to perform all the different aspects of the father role: caring, playing, educating, disciplining and showing affection. There were differences in the intensity of involvement. Sometimes these differences were related to the time spent with the child, others with their confidence as fathers as well as with access to the child.

Another relevant aspect about discipline and education is that the young fathers did them with a perspective of the future. What I mean by this is that the young fathers disciplined and educated their children so that they would grow up in the right path and with a good attitude.

Yeah, so I look and think, you know, no one is perfect, but I don't want my child to turn out like that, so I am trying to instill the discipline and then education but make it fun at the same time.

(Dominic, 22. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

And what do you want for your children?

Erm... just a good education, and like not to be like me I think.

Sorry?

Not to be like me when I was like young... I was always out on the street and getting into lots of trouble...

(Dan, 19. 2 year old son & 11 month old daughter, resident)

A child becomes... what you teach your child in that year, like it benefits them in a number... you can start early, they might not understand what you are teaching them and the more you teach them, they learn innit? So obviously she (partner) doesn't want... she wants a... she doesn't want our son to be in the same situation as us. Obviously she's smart yeah and she's going to uni now and she wants a better life, but she wants her child to be smart and to be something very... like positive in life. I wanted to be a footballer, but she said if you've got a footballer, at least you've got... he has got his brains and he's got something to fall back on, he's not going to be... he's going to be a smart, that's how

he was, and everything, and even, even smarter than us; that's what we just want him to be, we just teach him the good things that are going to benefit him in life, and there's nothing wrong with starting early...

(Saleem, 22. 2 year old son, non-resident)

This therefore denotes an engagement that goes beyond the present moment and it may be significant in seeing how strong and stable the father-child relationship is. Indeed, if there is a future strategy this may demonstrate that the young fathers saw themselves involved in their children's lives in the longer term.

The activities of disciplining and educating can be related to Coleman's ideas of social capital in the family, which were based upon parents' ability to transmit human capital to their children. According to Coleman (1988), one of the ways in which this was done was by being physically present and engaged. This could be seen when fathers spoke about doing educational activities with their children. In relation to social capital the engagement of young fathers can be seen as representing the idea that even when human capital in families is low, the social capital present in the family can be high. Thus, the quotes above support what was argued in the theory chapter: even though young fathers may have a higher dropout school rate or may put their formal education on hold, this does not mean they cannot inculcate education into their children's lives. For this reason, as was argued, when there is a strong father-child bond and fathers are able to have a relationship with their children, the lack of formal education does not always appear to put a stop to their desire to educate their children. Moreover, a great emphasis was put in education as a way to move forward in life, meaning that the ideas that social capital promote are enacted by the young fathers.

Overall, with their actions young fathers are challenging what is typically expected of them. These could serve as evidence that young fathers can be there for their children and they can provide good quality parenting. More examples like these are needed in order to give a more positive view of young fatherhood and help break negative stereotypes. Positive examples would help create new discourses of young fathering that move away from the detached young fathers and into more nurturing roles.

6.4 Young men and the emotional side of fathering

The emotional aspect of the father-child relationship has been explored in this thesis in relation to the moment of birth as well as earlier in this chapter when discussing involvement in the baby phase. In this last section we return to the emotional aspect of the father-child relationship, but this time in the meaning that young fathers attached to it in relation to their role and contribution to their children's lives.

6.4.1 Young fathers: emotions and the meaning of time

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the baby phase was a time for bonding through caregiving activities but some of the young fathers did not find this phase as exciting as when the children were a little older. As the babies grew and became more interactive, the young fathers seemed to enjoy their relationship more as they could play and educate them. The same seems to apply to the emotional father-child relationship. Indeed, one of the aspects of the children growing up was the way in which the sons and daughters could show love and emotion towards their fathers. Max and Greg's quotes are examples of this.

Once they could talk and walk, did it change things for you? Did you get closer to them or not?

Yeah... when they can say "Oh I love you daddy" "Daddy" or "I want just daddy"...

(Max, 23. 6 year & 3 year old sons, non-resident)

So did anything change when she could like, interact with you a little bit more or..?

I started erm... I started feeling more emotionally tied up to her. 'Cos she is asking me questions, she is talking to me now, like when she is a baby she's just laying there, she is not really doing anything.

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

One of the aspects that the young fathers spoke about in a positive way was feeling close to their children, sharing a bond and feeling loved by them. It may be deemed significant that the young fathers chose to speak to me about this. It points towards the way in which there is a cultural climate in which young fathers can feel comfortable to open up about this subject. Indeed, as argued by Dermott (2008:64),

Emotions are not in themselves a new dimension of fatherhood, but rather that emotional openness and the displaying of emotions have particular significance for our ideas of contemporary fatherhood and doing fathering.

The reciprocal emotional bond may be particularly important for the father-child relationship. It appears to help the young men feel important and needed, and it seems to cement the father-child attachment. This in turn may contribute to a greater chance that the relationship will last in the longer term. Overall, it can thus be speculated that the importance of having a continuous relationship with their child is that the emotional bond turns into a reciprocal one. So it is no longer just the men feeling love for their children, but actually feeling loved by them. And this reciprocity makes the young men feel good about themselves, as they are no longer just giving but also receiving. This may be an important part in understanding why

the longer fathers are involved the less likely it is they will lose contact with their children.

Conceptualisations of fatherhood have changed, as it is now argued that “involved/good fathers are emotionally attached to their children and spend quality time with them” (Gillies, 2009:53). For example, a large scale survey from the US, pointed out that emotional closeness was regarded as an essential aspect of the father role, rated higher by both mothers and fathers over economic provision (Waller, 2002). The majority of fathers in this research fulfilled both requirements: they spoke of the love they felt for their children, as vital to the relationship, and they tried to spend quality time with them. Saleem’s quote embodies this idea:

We’ve just got a very close relationship, a father and son relationship, we are very close, we get on together, we spend a lot of time together, he is always with me.

(Saleem, 20. 2 years old son, resident)

In this sense as argued by Miller (2011:1) there have been “a number shifts in societal structures and features, which appear to herald, and make possible, new opportunities for men’s engagement in fathering”. This shift can in turn be considered to work for the benefit of young fathers.

Indeed, a number of men reflected on this situation, and pointed out at other ways in which to contribute to one’s family that they deemed more important than providing.

After 6-8 months into it, I got stuck into it and you know, I just started to realise it’s about the time that you spend with him and what not, raising a child. You know, a lot of fathers out there think, you know, you need this incredible income and what not to look after your family but it’s not, it’s mainly time, you know, as long as you’re - as long as you put that time in, you know, yeah... being a father works out, you know.

(Steve, 25. 5 years old son, non-resident)

No matter even if I’m broke or not broke, you know what I mean, just as long as I am there I think that’s gonna count more than anything.

Being there sort of...

Yeah... I think even if they are suffering, I think me being there suffering with them is... they take on board as family, you know what I mean... really being with your family, really caring. I’m sure they are not gonna hold it against me if I didn’t have that much money, you know what I mean?

(Tim, 24. 3 year old son and 8 month old daughter, resident)

Thus, one of the readings that can be done from these narratives is that, given their inability to provide for their children, they find other task that they can fulfill and other ways to contribute something to their child's life. In a sense, these young fathers may be shaping their role in a way that moves away from the economic provider, but that still legitimizes their status as father.

Moreover, Tim brings one new dimension: he is reflecting on his role as a father from his own perspective, but he is also reflecting on it considering the image that his children will have of him in the future. This may be too consequence of the fatherless upbringing that many of the young fathers spoke about. It can be argued that young men appear to be so aware to the influence that their own fathers had on them, that they do not want their children to experience their absence.

The literature on fatherhood does suggest that working and providing for one's child is generally beneficial to the father-child relationship, as research has found that fathers who provide feel more positive about their role (Bunting and McAuley, 2004). Moreover, research also suggests that "financially stressed fathers tend to function less adequately as parents" (Florsheim *et al*, 1999:180). However, for young fathers, contextual forces may sometimes interfere with the benefits, or possibility, of working. The next section deals with this issue.

6.4.2 Young fathers and economic provision

As mentioned earlier, the majority of young men were not able to fully maintain their children economically, and out of twenty-two young dads two (Dan and Dominic) worked continuously and full-time. In relation to the breadwinner role there seemed to be two groups: for some fathers it was a stress element in the relationship, while other found it a positive experience.

One of the issues that young fathers faced in relation to employment and providing for their family in the context of cohabitation were low wages as well as unstable employment patterns, which can be related to the issue of "fast track transitions" (Jones, 2002:3). Jones (2002:3) explains how there has been a polarization of young people's transitions experiences, with two opposite pathways:

'fast track' transitions are becoming more distinctive, more problematic and more stigmatized when the increasingly middle-class majority is deferring entry into the labour market and into marriage and childbearing until later.

I would add that the problem is not only the differing ways in which young people are undergoing their transitions, with some being more socially acceptable than others. Added to this acceptability there is the changing nature of the labour market. As mentioned in the literature chapter, with less manual and industrial employment available, for young men who do not continue in the education path, full-time, stable work becomes hard to achieve (Nayak, 2006). However, some fathers did work, but not always continuously. A significant minority of those cohabiting and working presented full-time employment as creating tensions in the relationship with the mother. Lesser availability for caring tasks, as well as in fulfilling their parenting role were some of the tensions created by working outside the home. In these cases, there appeared to be contextual reasons that may have put a further strain on the new situation that these couples found themselves. For example, one of the men who experienced this situation was Justin. He had twin sons and he and his then partner were living in Kent, away from their parents when the babies were born. Although Justin lived in Kent with his ex-partner and sons, he worked as a traffic warden in London when the twins arrived. Thus he spent 4 days away from home every week and spoke of the experience in the following way:

Because she was complaining about being alone and stuff like that so I said alright, I decided that I would give up everything down here, in London, and then I'll look for work down in Kent. That was very hard... and I gave her the time, cos I didn't wanna leave her alone with the boys, I moved down for a little while, and I would help round the house but at the same time she wanted to have the food and buy the boys clothes and stuff, so when I moved down there I was on benefits, but still job seeker allowance and stuff like that is not gonna support the family... is not gonna go very far, so I said to her, I'm gonna look for work, I said to her... I said to her "on Friday I'm gonna look for work"

Ok.

Which I did, and then I went out and I said "today I'm gonna go and look for work" and when I came back she was really upset...

'Cos you were looking for work..?

Well, yes, because I left her alone with the boys.

Riiiiight.

For most of the day. So to me I can't win...

(Justin, 24. 3 year old twin sons & 2 year old son, non-resident)

Justin and his ex-partner had twins, which may be one of the reasons she may have found it particularly hard to cope when she was alone. Also, as mentioned before, at the time they were living away from their families and had little practical support²⁰. It seems that the central issue presented by Justin is one of tensions between the role that he thought would help the family, bringing the money, which clashed with his ex-partner's need for practical support (but also material needs). It can be argued that as roles for fathers diversify and

²⁰ After the break-up Justin's ex-partner moved closer to his parents, as they had a good relationship, so she could get support, re-enforcing maybe the importance of family support in helping young parents cope.

becomes less set, so does the scope for disagreements between partners over what a father should do for his family. Easterbrooks *et al* (2007:214) argue that one of the reasons why the paternal role is influenced by the mother is because this role “is not well defined by society and marital support helps to define it, so that men know “how to be” as fathers”. Moreover, it can be argued that new fatherhood also raises expectations, for both men and women, as to what roles fathers should adopt.

Kieran was one of the young fathers that spoke positively about being in paid employment and providing for his family, in what could be considered a traditional family setting. Working appeared to be impacting positively on Kieran’s identity as a father and in turn on his relationship with his partner and baby. This would point towards the significance that paid employment may have in helping some young men, but by no means all, forge their identities and role as fathers. Kieran for example said that he felt like “*a complete man*” when working and providing for his family.

What is good about living in like this house as a family, as a dad?

Um, you feel like... I am 21, you do feel like ... I don't know - I feel like a married couple type of thing sometimes, but I feel really close and I feel like really... like obviously when I am working, you feel like a complete man, do you know what I mean? Because you get things for your family and you are working to earn money, you are out there, you know what I mean? Like before I was [unclear] and I was drinking - so I was doing nothing... it was just depressing stuff so you do feel quite... I mean when you are not working and stuff... but yeah, I feel complete now that I'm going out working and I come back home and stuff... a married couple... I have got my job, my dinner waiting, got my little boy to see, do you know what I mean?

Yeah, and you like that?

Yeah, it feels like a happy home sort of thing, do you know what I mean?

Right. And then when you are not working..?

When I am not working, you know... because we are in each other's faces all the time, do you know what I mean, all day? So it's just oh yeah...

(Kieran, 21. 6 month old son, non-resident)

However, since Kieran was working through a temporary work agency, he had no regular work and found those times at home difficult to cope with, particularly due to a reported lack of space²¹. Thus holding on to those routines appeared sometimes difficult. In the case of Kieran it was partly related to not having a stable job, as reported by him. However, it is debatable whether lack of stable work was the sole reason for Kieran’s issues with his girlfriend. For example, he pointed out how after the birth of his son “*I weren't really going*

²¹ This lack of space can be taken as being more symbolic rather than physical, as Kieran and his partner had a rather spacious two bed flat for themselves and their baby.

out with my friends, spending time with them, cos when you have a baby they don't really ring you anymore cos you can't go out as much", which added to his aforementioned feeling of depression. Moreover, he also points at the same time that he couldn't connect properly with his girlfriend, as he found her too focused on the baby. Moreover, Kieran's situation could be taken as an example of the complexities of the situation that young men may find themselves in when attempting to start a family. It showed the different layers that their everyday lives are made of: Kieran, was not only dealing with the transition to fatherhood, but also with changes to his identity and particularly with his need to identify a role within the family that he felt comfortable with. It was clear from the interview that Kieran identified with and adhered to more traditional notions of the role of the father and put emphasis on the positive side of contributing economically. However, it appears from his narrative that his ability to fulfill that role was being curtailed by structural forces, particularly his socio-economic background and lack of profession. This can be taken as an example of the aforementioned biographies of choice and how in the case of young fathers, their ability to act and take control of their situation, their agency, may at times be conditioned by external forces. In this sense, it can be argued that it is not useful to see young fathers either as simply as victims of their background or as making free choices but as being implicated in a recursive relationship with their environment and situation.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the father-child relationship from the baby phase up to when the children are a little older. It has investigated four aspects of the father-child relationship: baby care, play and education, emotional fathering and being an economic provider.

It can be argued that none of the young fathers that took part in this study openly showed resistance to taking on or learning about caring tasks, although some like Ali may have felt less confident. What this section suggests is that young men take interest in caring for their babies, whether this is a learning curve or a teaching experience for them. This may indicate that, contrary to popular beliefs, these young fathers are incorporating care into their fatherhood identity and masculinity (Connell, 1995). Therefore, given the right support and environment most (if not all) young fathers can be good carers.

Most importantly, it can be argued that the interest that the young men had in learning about caring for their children denote a desire to be active fathers, to take responsibility and to be there right from the start. What appears incongruent is that given the desire expressed by young men in research of wanting to be there, the relative high rates of absent teenage fatherhood (particularly as time goes on) do not match this expressed desire. This, I would argue, points towards structural problems that the young men face. From a structuration

perspective it can be argued that with their actions they are contributing to changing the structure and thus helping redefine young fatherhood.

Discipline and education were part of the father role taken up by fathers, particularly as the children grew up into their toddler years. Disciplining was seen as a difficult task as the fathers tried to be hard but loving when instilling discipline. This may be related to the importance placed in having an emotional bond with the children and feeling wanted by them. It can be said that young fathers enjoyed and valued the reciprocal relationships they had with their children. They were able to give love and protection, and acknowledge the pleasure and value of feeling loved and wanted by their children. This may be a very important aspect of young fatherhood, particularly because of their difficulty attaining the provider role. As has been argued the breadwinner role appears still important for fathers' identity as well as for society as a whole. A greater emphasis on the emotional bond may be what facilitates the young father- child relationship in the longer term.

Overall, it can be argued that for the majority of young fathers in this research it was not possible to pick up the hegemonic discourses of the father role a provider. But the growing acceptance and discourses on fatherhood that challenge hegemonic masculinity ideals of the role of the father gave young men alternative options to align themselves with. This, it can be argued is the essence in trying to focus on the strengths, rather than the weaknesses of young fathers.

Chapter 7 Living together or not: tensions and rewards

As argued in the literature chapter, media and policy portrayals of young fathers largely present them as reckless, absent or non-committed (Duncan *et al*, 2007). In relation to the mother of the child, a common perception is that the young father walks away from her, “fearful of the adult responsibilities of parenthood” (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005:138). However, in their research on young parents, Corlyon and McGuire (1997:8) found that “more young fathers appear to be pushed out than drop out”, and thus the dynamic by which young fathers come to be absent, or present, is not clear (Kalil *et al*, 2005). Based on my interviews, I would argue that this absent-present dichotomy is not necessarily helpful in understanding young parents’ relationships. It can be said that this dichotomy does not offer an accurate view of the complexity of the young couples’ romantic involvement and their living arrangements. Thus for example, while some young couples had definitely separated and moved on, others were in a grey area, not completely together, but not apart.

However, despite limited research and lack of clarity into young parents’ romantic relationships, the relationship with the mother is regarded as an important part of a young man’s experience of fatherhood (Easterbrooks *et al*, 2007; Kalil *et al*, 2005). In part, the importance of relationships lays in their power to shape and determine the father-child relationship. For example, mothers can act as gatekeepers, granting access, or not, to the children (Easterbrooks *et al*, 2007).

This chapter explores how young fathers experience commitment to and cohabitation with the mother and their child as well as the processes of breaking up after cohabitation. Another aim is to present the reasons the young men gave for not sharing a home with the mother of their child, and how they managed their role as non-resident fathers. The types of questions I am trying to answer are: What happens when young fathers commit to living with their partner and child(ren)? What happens when they don’t? What are the factors that make men want to cohabit and what factors make men live away from their partner? Why do they stay with their partners despite difficult circumstances?

The first section of this chapter starts with an outline of the living arrangements of young fathers at the time of the interview. It maps out residency patterns, that is, the different housing transitions that the young men have done since the conception of their first child. This is presented as a table and is designed to provide the residency context of the young fathers, and give a sense of the number of housing transitions undertaken from the conception of their child onwards.

Section two first explores the motivations and decision-making processes behind young men's experiences of moving in with their partner. What emerged from the data were rather individualized patterns and situations. For example, some couples moved in during conception while others started living together months or years after the birth. One of the central themes explored is the concept of commitment, both to the mother and to the child. This section then moves on to compare the different cohabitating experiences of those men who were already living with their partner at the time of conception, to those who moved in after the birth. Finally, it concentrates on how young cohabiting fathers juggled their role as providers and carers, the tensions and rewards it brought to their lives.

Section three investigates the conflict that young cohabiting couples experience. It explores how young fathers cope with both the idea and the reality of moving out. Indeed, there were a number of men who were experiencing difficulties in their cohabiting relationships and were considering a break up. Others had already broken up after living together. This section first explores the difficulties and conflict experienced by young cohabiting fathers. This is followed by an exploration of how young men weigh up the pros and cons of leaving their shared home. A central theme is the fear young fathers felt about the potential negative consequences of living apart and away from their children. Finally, this section investigates the importance that young fathers placed on having a healthy relationship with the mother of their child(ren) after the break-up.

The final section focuses on the group of fathers who had never lived with their partner and child, and the reasons they gave for living away from them. Most of the young fathers in this research fall into the category of what has been termed *fragile fathers* by Dermott (2008:111) which is defined as "fathers for whom temporal, financial, biological or emotional links with their children are either non-existent or under-threat". Ultimately, this chapter aims to explore the ways in which young men are there for their children, despite the adverse relational circumstances they may find themselves in at times.

7.1 An exploration of residency patterns

the growing diversity of life course and residency patterns of man and children today... need to be recognised when conceptualizations of paternal involvement are broadened (Marsiglio et al, 2000:1175).

For just over half of the young fathers that took part in this research, neither the news of the pregnancy nor the birth of the child seemed to be a determining reason to move in with their girlfriends. Residency trajectories varied amongst the young fathers, as the table below shows. Most fathers were not cohabiting when their child was conceived, 19 out of 22, and

the news of the pregnancy sparked cohabitation amongst 4 couples. Once the child had been born, a further 6 fathers moved in with their respective girlfriends; however this was not always straight away. For example, Max moved in a year after the birth and for Mark it took longer, his girlfriend and son moved in when their child was four. At the time of the interview eight young men had never lived with their partner and children. The table below provides an overview of residency patterns amongst the young men. The term *resident* refers to those young men who shared a house/flat full-time with their partner and child(ren). These men did not have living accommodation elsewhere. *Non-resident* men did not live together with their child(ren), partner or ex-partner but sometimes stayed overnight or spend longer time periods in the house.

At the time of the interview as the table above shows, 7 fathers out of 22 were resident and one (Eric) was in what resembled a Living Apart Together (LAT) arrangement: he had a flat right opposite his partner's and while he visited her every day, he still kept his own place. Living Apart Together can be defined as:

a couple that does not share a home. Each of the two partners lives in his or her own home in which other people might also live. They define themselves as a couple and they perceive that their close surrounding personal network does so as well (Levin, 2004:226-227).

The table also shows that a total of 13 young fathers had at some point lived with their child(ren). This means that nearly half of those cohabiting had stopped living with their partner and child(ren). While four had ceased sharing accommodation with their child as a result of relationship break up (Finley, Justin, Max and Steve), another did so as a result of going to prison (Mason) and another one when his child was taken into care (Jayden).

In this sense a good number of fathers had experienced fatherhood in the context of being resident. What seems important to point out is how all the young fathers that stopped living with their partner and child, a total of 6 out of 13, have managed to keep contact.²² The table below shows the residency status at conception, during the pregnancy, after the birth and at the time of the interview.

²² In all cases the ages of the children were around the 5 years old mark, except one who was 3 months old. Research suggests this is the age until which young fathers keep contact with their children (Kiernan, 1995). Interestingly these young men appeared to me to have cemented their relationships and could be considered as being less at risk of losing contact.

Name	At conception	During pregnancy	After birth	At time of interview
Abiola	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R
Akram	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R
Ali	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R
Ashton	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R
Dan	R	R	R	R
Dominic	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R
Enam	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R
Eric	LAT	LAT	LAT	LAT
Finley	N-R	R	R	N-R
Greg	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R
Jayden	N-R	R	R	N-R
Justin	R	R	R	N-R
Kieran	N-R	R	R	R
Mark	N-R	N-R	R	R
Marvin	R	N-R	R	R
Mason	N-R	N-R	R	N-R
Max	N-R	N-R	R	N-R
Ryan	N-R	N-R	R	R
Saleem	N-R	N-R	R	R
Steve	N-R	N-R	R	N-R
Tim	N-R	N-R	R	R
Tyler	N-R	N-R	N-R	N-R

Residency patterns. N-R= Non-resident, R=Resident, LAT= Living apart together

7.2 Young fathers and cohabitation

This section explores the cohabitation experiences of young fathers, with a particular focus on those couples who had positive experiences. It first focuses on the decision-making process of moving in with the partner and child(ren). It then investigates how young men perceive the impact on the couple relationship of the timing of moving in with their partners. Finally, it investigates the experiences of being a live-in partner and parent and juggling the role of the provider and carer.

7.2.1 Making the decision to move in

Ten young men that took part in this study made the commitment to live with the mother of their baby around the time of conception or after the birth. Indeed, as mentioned before, four men moved in with their girlfriends during the pregnancy (Jayden, Mason, Kieran and Finley) and six did it after the birth of the child (Saleem, Ryan, Max, Mark, Tim and Steve).

In this sense, a number of fathers added a new transition, that of cohabitation with a partner, to their transition into fatherhood. Also 3 young fathers (Dan, Marvin and Justin) were already living together at the time of conception.

Moving in with the mother and child may denote a greater degree of commitment to the partner and baby as well as a willingness to take up the responsibilities of fatherhood on a day-to-day basis. While this may be in part true, I would argue that the decision to start living together and take responsibility was sometimes brought about by contextual factors. Indeed, in relation to young men taking the decision of moving in, there were what Rolfe (2002:143) calls “push factors” which she identified as overcrowding and arguments in the family of origin home. While overcrowding in the family home was not explicitly mentioned by any of the young fathers, arguments with family (or with their mother) were one of the reasons for which some young men favoured the decision to move in with their partner. Arguments with their mother was also mentioned by a number of fathers as the reasons why they had moved out of the parental home prior to the conception of the baby.

Mark was one of the young fathers that exemplify the process of moving in as one that is determined and influenced by contextual forces. Mark’s partner and child moved into his flat four years after his son was born (the boy was 7 years old at the time of the interview), when his partner started having problems at home with her mother and stepfather.

And then so when he reaches about 4... I mean, she decides to move in? How did that happen? How did you sort of move in together with her and the...

Well basically my wife²³ had been having problems with her mother and her boyfriend (girlfriend’s mother’s boyfriend) and stuff, so she actually moved in with me so from then onwards we was living together with each other... yeah...

Riiight, and why then? Is there a reason or...

No that was between... like her and her family, yeah, she was just having problems at home, she wanted to get out of there... so she moved in with me.

(Mark, 23. 7 year old son, resident)

Mark presents the decision to cohabit with his partner as one mainly influenced by the fact that she was experiencing problems at home. Moreover, what seems interesting is that that when Mark’s son was first born he felt that “*it was nice having a son because I thought it’s as if I’ve got responsibility you know, this is mine, my responsibility*”. However, this feeling of responsibility did not appear to be followed by the decision to live with him. Indeed, it could be expected that a father’s feeling or responsibility towards his newborn would be

23 Mark referred to his partner as “wife” even though they were not married

coupled with an intention to live the child. One interpretation of this is that in Mark's life responsibility takes a different meaning, and it could be argued, a more personal one. This can be taken as an example of the individualized nature (away from socio-structural norms) of young men's decision taking mechanisms, as well as the personal and localised meanings they sometimes attach to certain areas of fatherhood, such as *responsibility*.

From a structuration point of view, this implies a lessening of the influence of socio-cultural norms on the individual, and a greater weight of idiosyncratic decision-making, leading to what has been termed "biographies of choice" (Hey, 2005:855). However, it can be argued that in the case of young fathers, these so called biographies of choice may not entirely apply, for their ability to decide (agency) is partly affected (and constricted) by their socio-economic background as well as their age (i.e. the structure). Indeed, what it is missing from Mark's narrative is whether he initially considered moving in, like other fathers in this research did, but felt unable to due to his socio-economic positioning or age. For example, in relation to absent fathers, Whitehead (2008:292) argues that they are "not a homogeneous group, and that they may be apart from their children for reasons beyond their control". Thus, it is possible that in young men's lives, constraining structural forces may act against their ability to freely decide and more so than for older fathers. In turn, it can be argued that negative representations of young fathers often do not acknowledge the structural view. On the contrary, they see the young men's decisions as being solely dictated by their agency, this is the power to choose with little or none attention paid to their circumstances.

Another example of the potential lessening of the influence of societal norms (detraditionalisation) is Saleem, who presented his move as gradual and circumstantial and instilled with a sense of opportunism.

Basically, the way it happened was that my mum was moving and basically where ... my girlfriend was staying in her apartment that she got, it wasn't a proper apartment because obviously she had to go through the steps [inaudible], plus she had a chance... they gave her like a studio flat - that's what she had. So whilst she's at this studio flat she was a bit scared, like living by herself, she was not used to it - having a child there - the child [inaudible], so it ended up being a thing where I used to go round there a lot and then it just ended up that I started moving in bit by bit. We just kind of got used to living with each other and we decided that we might as well just have a go and see what happens.

(Saleem, 22. 2 year old son, resident)

The aforementioned "push factors" do not have to necessarily be negative ones (i.e. family arguments). For example, in Saleem's case his mother was moving out, which appeared to be a contributing factor towards making the decision to move in permanently with his girlfriend

and baby. It can be argued that the fact that Saleem places his mum at the start of his narrative on how he came to cohabit with his partner may be indicative of the importance of contextual forces in the process of moving in. One unspoken factor that promotes, or deters, cohabitation may be economic, as some of the young mothers had been allocated council flats into which the young fathers moved to. Thus there could be economic influences on cohabiting decisions amongst young families. Knowing these economic circumstances may help understand the pressures that money may exert on the dynamics on the couple relationship. Moreover, it could offer a clearer picture on the issue of lone motherhood amongst young women. For example, in their study of young people growing up in deprived neighbourhoods MacDonald and Marsh (2005) question the accuracy of the reported living arrangements of the young parents they spoke to. This is due to the issue of hidden “semi-cohabitation” an expression they borrow from Phoenix (1991) to explain the situation in which some young couples may not disclose they live together for fear of losing their benefits. For this reason, they argue that “published indicators of ‘lone parenthood’ may overestimate the extent to which women in poor neighbourhoods raise children independently” (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005:137). Equally, this may conceal the role that young fathers play in their children’s lives as they may actually be more present than research suggests. In addition, fear of losing benefit entitlements could also act as a deterrent for further involvement on the young man’s side.

Tim was one of the only fathers who explicitly related moving in with his partner to wanting to be there and live with his child. To put his situation into context, Tim only found out he had a child 4 months after his son had been born and initially he was going to live away from him. But on reflection on the relationship he had with his own father, he decided to become a resident dad. Tim’s father left his mother when Tim was 2 years old. He moved back in 9 years later and tried to get close to Tim, but died when Tim was about 13. Thus in relation to the decision to live with his child he said:

The point is, anyways, he (father) wasn’t around so... and when he tried to get to know me, he died just before even... a couple of years after and then that’s it, he was gone, you know what I mean... Point is, it made me think I don’t wanna leave my son like that...

Right.

Cos in many ways I was happy I had a father, but I wasn’t happy because it was a part-time father. It made me think I don’t wanna be a part time father, so I kind of struck I deal and said I’ll come and help you out, I’ll live with you for a bit or whatever...

(Tim, 24. 3 year old son & 8 month old daughter, resident)

It can be argued young men’s personal experiences of being fathered, and their influence on their own role as fathers, cannot be taken as simply individual processes. Indeed, these reflections may also relate to wider socio-cultural norms around the role of the father. For

example, the notion of part-time fatherhood, condemned by Tim above but also by other fathers, could be taken as representative of this. Ideas of the appropriate role of the father have changed over time and are subjected to current ideals of what a good father is. As Dermott (2008:17) argues,

the cultural transformation of fatherhood has seen a move away from the good father as moral guardian, disciplinarian and educator to the single role of financial provider to a contemporary ideal of nurturing involvement and the expectation of equal parenting.

What is interesting is that when it comes to young fathers, the values they hold in relation to fatherhood are not matched with their *lived realities*, often having difficulties to live with their children and thus be involved on a daily basis. Such scenario points back to the aforementioned structural constraints which potentially affect young fathers' everyday lives.

7.2.2 The timing of entry into cohabitation

In general terms, it appears that those couples who were resident and had a good relationship were either living together prior to the pregnancy news, or the decision to move in happened naturally. These young fathers seemed to have adapted well to fatherhood and did not present much (or any) conflict, particularly in terms of lifestyle or identity changes. In fact, it can be argued that it is lack of conflict, both in relation to the mother of the baby and to their identity, which sets them apart from those that had poor relationships with their partners or ex-partners. In this sense, the way in which they described their transition to fatherhood could be considered closer to older (working class) fathers' experiences. For this reason, the importance of a healthy father-mother relationship cannot be underestimated. Research has pointed out that those fathers that have a harmonious relationship with the mother of their children show better parenting skills (Easterbrooks *et al*, 2007). However, this same study acknowledges the "complexity of understanding fathering and family relations amongst young fathers" (Easterbrooks *et al*, 2007:214). It can be argued that this could be partly ascribed to the variety of relationship situations that young couples find themselves in. Another issue may be the many outside influences (i.e. the relationship with extended family or the young fathers' employment status) that can affect the romantic or parental relationship. An added factor may be that the fact that the young fathers had stable relationships and living arrangements meant that their young age had less of an influence in their parenting practice.

When the interviews for this research took place, in 2007 and 2008, three fathers (Dan, Marvin and Saleem) were cohabiting with their girlfriends and child(ren) in what could be considered stable relationships. Out of these three young fathers, two (Dan and Marvin) were living with their girlfriends prior to the conception of their first child. The trajectory of Marvin and his girlfriend Kim was a little complex. Marvin and Kim were together for a few months and then broke up, being apart for two years. During those two years, Kim got together with someone else and had a daughter with him. When Kim's baby was 8 months old, Marvin and she got back together²⁴ and the baby became Marvin's step daughter. Shortly after getting back together, Kim moved in with Marvin and his mother. This meant that his stepdaughter spent her time between Marvin's mother's house and the maternal grandmother's place. Marvin and Kim went on to have a biological daughter, and by the time she was conceived Marvin and Kim were living in their own home.

Dan's situation was different. He moved in with his girlfriend and her mother (because he did not get on with his own mother) at the age of 15, and one year later he became a father. Dan and his girlfriend did not move into their own place until their son was around 6 months old. They seemed to have a very stable relationship, with clearly defined gendered roles: he worked full-time and she looked after the children and the home. As a researcher, I became interested in why in his case, his transition to fatherhood had been relatively problem-free and I wanted him to elaborate on this.

And you know... the time that you've been a dad, since you became a dad, or even before like during the pregnancy, what are the things that have helped the most?

Erm.. I think being like... still being with her helps a lot cos it'd be different if we broke up, yeah that'd be a lot different. And actually living together as well because we was [sic] already used to it, like say, if we was living separate and then we had the baby and then moved in together it'd be a bit different because we wouldn't know what each other is like... and we'd probably be getting on each other's nerves... but obviously we were used to it already it was easier.

(Dan 19. 2 year old son & 11 month old daughter, resident)

It can be argued that there are two key aspects to Dan's narrative as to why so far his experience of becoming and being a father has been a stable one. First, Dan puts value in the fact that he is still living with his girlfriend. He sees this as a contributing factor to his smooth experience of being a live-in, provider father. Cohabitation coupled with economic provision was a task that most fathers found difficult to maintain or embrace, as will be seen later in the chapter. Elaborating on why "*still being with her helps*", Dan mentioned that if they lived apart the children would live with her and she would be "*the*

²⁴ According to Marvin, Kim's ex-partner and father of her daughter did not want to be involved in the baby's life.

main person” and that “I would be the person that comes now and then to see them or something”, “’cos we are together, we are both equal”. Such a viewpoint can be taken as representing how residency status may influence the way in which young fathers view their roles, with residency giving them a stronger status or weight in their children’s lives. It can be argued that despite the aforementioned diversification of living arrangements (Marsiglio *et al*, 2000), residency status cannot be underestimated as a factor making men feel secure in their role as fathers, particularly those in good relationships. As will be seen later in the chapter, when young cohabiting fathers consider moving out, one of their main worries is how this will affect the relationship with their children. Equally, those who have broken up after cohabiting often speak of changes in the father-child relationships and in some cases having to negotiate access to the child. Florsheim *et al* (1999:80) argue that “when fathers and mothers are not cohabiting the differences between paternal – and maternal – child relationships tend to be more dramatic”. In this sense, residency status is likely to dictate the type of activities that young fathers do with their children, and the type of care they provide. It may also determine frequency of contact and subsequent involvement.

Secondly, Dan finds the fact that they were living together prior to the conception of their child as a helpful factor when adjusting to the transition to fatherhood in the context of cohabitation. This may be an important factor, as coupling the transition to fatherhood with the transition to being a live-in partner could be hard to adapt to. For example, Saleem moved in with his girlfriend a few months after their baby was born. Although he adapted relatively well to the experience of cohabitation with his partner and child, he initially found it hard.

You move in, and then what happens? I mean how does it change the relationship? I mean waking up to her every day...

It was very hard because I was not really used to living with someone in that sense apart from my sisters and my brother and mum, so it wasn't very easy, like being with someone and that person is your partner and you have a child together - basically it's like a... you are starting a little family. So it was a bit weird but I kind of adjusted myself to it and got used to certain things every day. I was not used to... I was not used to waking up and being in someone's... someone being right next to me like that all the time and having a child crying, because obviously when I am not living there, I wasn't putting up with really... I wasn't really putting up with my son crying all the time, but living there, I had to get used to it - crying, crying, crying, and you just have to get used to it.

(Saleem 22. 2 year old son, resident)

One salient aspect of Saleem’s narrative is his description of the process of starting to live with his partner and child, culminating in the sentence “*you are starting a little family*”. The concept of being a family seemed to be significant for many young fathers both when living

with their partner as well as after breaking up, as will be seen later. This may reflect the variety of contemporary family forms, and how young fathers adhere to those discourses when reflecting on their role. What seems interesting to me is that in the academic literature there is little mention of “teenage” or “young” families. This can be taken either as a representation of how young couples are perceived, not solid enough to be considered a family, or as caused by the actual greater fragility of young relationships following the birth of the child (Tabberer *et al*, 2000).

On practical terms it can be argued that when young fathers make the decision to live with the mother and child they are creating in fact a family. This entails new dynamics, and one could argue even greater responsibilities than being a non-resident father. For example, Saleem presents living with his child qualitatively different than living away from him. There is the sense from his narrative that before committing to live full time with his son he could avoid certain (difficult) situations related to caregiving, like his son crying²⁵, but once he was in the house full-time these were no longer avoidable. Identifying the most challenging aspects of young men’s family building experiences during the transition to fatherhood, may be key to understand difficulties surrounding live-in fatherhood. It may also help shed light into why young families tend to be more fragile than older ones.

7.3 Young fathers’ experiences of moving out

There were 6 fathers who had been resident, but that at the time of the interview had stopped living with their partner and child(ren). The most common route out of residency was the break-up of the relationship, with 4 fathers (Max, Justin, Finley and Steve) giving that as their reason why they were no longer living with their children. Another two fathers, Mason and Jayden, stopped living together for other reasons. In this way, Mason stopped living with his child and partner after they were both put in prison for a few months. At the time of the interview Mason and his girlfriend had broken up, but had a good relationship, and their child was living with Mason’s parents. The other father was Jayden whose child was taken into care, and he and his girlfriend were together but no longer cohabiting. There were a further 4 fathers (Kieran, Mark, Ryan and Tim) who were cohabiting but experiencing problems which were making them consider a break-up. This section will discuss both men’s experiences of breaking up and moving out as well as young fathers’ thoughts around the possible break-up. It transpires from the interviews that men engaged in a process which involved weighing up the pros and cons of stopping cohabitation in relation to the child, both before the break-up and after.

7.3.1 Cohabiting: Difficult experiences

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interviews generally suggest that those men who moved in with their partner and child found it difficult to adopt all the responsibilities that

²⁵ Crying was mentioned by the majority of fathers as one of the hardest parts of dealing with their babies.

being a live-in father entails. Indeed all the young men who had moved in with their partner, except Dan, Marvin and Saleem from the section above, either had broken up or were considering it. Indeed, living with the partner and child appeared to bring certain types of stresses that were absent when fathers were not resident (however, these fathers had other types of stresses).

At the time of the interview four men (Max, Justin, Finley and Steve) had lived with their partners and moved out as a result of breaking up. These young men spoke of their conflict and problems during their time cohabiting. There were another four young men (Kieran, Ryan, Tim and Mark) who were still cohabiting with their partners at the time of the interview and spoke about arguments in their relationship, which were making them question its future. This first section explores the different issues that young men identified as creating tension in their day-to-day cohabiting experiences. These included: juggling all the roles that being a live-in father brought, conflicting needs and roles in relation to the mother amongst others.

Finley was one of the fathers that had broken up from his partner after cohabitation. Just like other fathers, Finley found the transition to fatherhood combined with the transition to cohabitation difficult to cope with, referring to it as “*so much all at one time*”.

Right, so for 2 years you were together and happy and then arguments start. How did ... was it arguments about the child or..?

Um, I wouldn't say so much about the child, I would say... yeah, the child was an issue, sometimes it gets down to a difference of parenting, but I just find it... I think it was more the situation when like... I thought there's a lot of young people have kids already that really are wanted [unclear] and because we never lived together before, never had the kid... it was so much all at one time. The pressure bit, the pressure was there. And like then it was like... one of us has always got to be working as well... I was probably working so they don't spend time with them...

(Finley, 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

Finley moved in with his partner during the pregnancy. However, two years into cohabitating they started experiencing problems, which eventually led to their break up. There seems to be three key aspects to Finley's narrative: the timing of the transition into resident fatherhood, the pressures felt and the tensions between providing and spending time with the family. These were discussed by many of the young men in a variety of residency situations. For example, Dan (as outlined above) explained why he thought it was positive that he and his girlfriend were already living together when she fell pregnant.

However, the key seems to be that most of the young men in this research, just like Finley, struggled with their ability to take up all the demands that being a father in contemporary

society entail, particularly juggling providing with caring. If cohabiting with a partner is thrown into the equation, it appears that the pressure the young fathers feel is greater. In this sense, it can be argued that new fatherhood discourses permeate society and enter the everyday life of fathers, regardless of age. As a result, these discourses may create expectations, at the social and relational level, as to what the role of the young father ought to be. Thus, some young cohabiting fathers may experience difficulties keeping up not just with the roles, but with the expectations.

The accumulation of stresses can also be seen in Max, a father of two boys who moved in with his now ex-girlfriend a year after their first son was born. He pointed out the difficulties he encountered when faced with breadwinning and caring, coupled with cohabiting.

What were the most difficult bits, you know, during that time... during the first year of their lives really.

What were the most difficult bits? Try, try ... Trying to be myself, and the kids and the mum... just trying to do everything, when I moved in with her, I had to pay the rent, the electric... stuff like that. And then obviously the kids need things every day, like food shopping. It's a lot and they can eat a lot. But I think that another difficult bit as well was me trying to get up at 4 in the morning to try make a bottle...

(Max, 23. 6 & 3 year old sons, non-resident)

Max's story suggests that for some young men, fatherhood is made up of a number of different interrelated layers. For example, in talking about the experience of cohabiting and providing he is mentioning issues of: identity changes (juxtaposing "*trying to be myself with and the kids and the mum*") and juggling the providing ("*pay the rent, the electric... the kids need things every day, like food shopping*") and the carer role ("*trying to get up at 4 in the morning to try make a bottle*"). It appears that the interplay between these different aspects play a role in shaping the experience of fatherhood. Of central importance is the aforementioned juggling of providing and caring and having time for oneself. Indeed, what seems particularly relevant in Max's narrative, which was also mentioned by other working fathers, is the way in which despite working, he reports that he was still taking on caring tasks. While common discourses of young fatherhood do not portray them in a caring role (Reeves and Rehal, 2008), caring for their children was a central aspect of many of the young men in this research (both employed and not employed). This can be taken as an example of the way in which from a structuration perspective, new fatherhood discourses have become part of the structure. Indeed, it can be argued that new fatherhood practices offer young fathers alternative roles to that of the economic provider. When taking up those alternative roles, young fathers are contributing to changing the social structure of young fatherhood. Indeed, that fact that these young men were actively consuming and enacting new fatherhood practices may be indicative that rather than being an ideal, they are part of the social structure that shapes society.

7.3.2 Weighing up the pros and cons: Arguing in front of the children versus being there

The interviews suggest that arguing in front of the children was one of the main concerns that young fathers showed and was seen as a reason to break up, as it was mentioned by a third of participants. In particular it was the negative effect that arguing could have on the child which was concerning. This applies to young men who were currently living with their partners as well as those who had broken up. A harmonious couple relationship is important because it can affect the quality of the parenting. As Easterbrooks *et al* (2007:217) argue,

In general, when father–mother relationships were more positive (deeper, more supportive, less conflict) fathers were more likely to be involved with their children daily, and they spent more of this time in the family triad with mother and child.

Kieran, was one of the young men who were cohabiting at the time of the interview, but experiencing conflict with his partner. He spoke in the following way about it:

How do you think that would affect you and Tyler?

Obviously like when... I don't know, it depends how it goes, the relationship innit? But I think obviously I would miss him if I wouldn't be able to see him - I wouldn't be able to wake up and see him and stuff, and spend all the day with him. But in the long run, like if we keep arguing and then the child picks that up, so I'd rather that than... I would rather him not go through that, what happened to me and her, he'd see it immediately.

Yeah, OK.

There have been kind of like disadvantages and advantages.

Yeah, so you think... what are the advantages for him...?

Stay away from the arguments. Just get away from the arguments... and stop picking up on the vibe...

(Kieran, 21. 6 month old son, resident)

In the extract above, Kieran is engaging in a clear process of weighing up what he called the “disadvantages” and “advantages” of moving out or staying. What seems relevant is that in the process of reflecting on a potential break-up, Kieran has to think of his needs and feelings (“I would miss him”) and those of his child (“I would rather him not go through that”) and decide which to put first. The focus of Kieran’s explanation is on the changing nature of his relationship with his child, saying at another point in the interview how moving out would make him a part-time father, with all the negative connotations attached to this expression. We can see here that Kieran undergoes a similar reflection to that of Dan earlier (page 157). It can be argued that young fathers’ fears on the potential changing relationship with their child

may not be unfounded. For example, Kalil *et al* (2005:208) research on perceptions of father involvement suggests that “once fathers disconnect from active parenting of their children in numerous realms, it is quite unusual to regain an active parenting role”. It appears that the young fathers valued the benefits that living with their children brought about, for example seeing them on an everyday basis, not missing out on them growing up, and bonding. These reflections may highlight the importance, and enjoyment that young men can derive from living with their children, and how the transition out of the home can as a result be a difficult one. The enjoyment of being there on a daily basis, or the acknowledgement of what one is missing out not being there every day, was a recurrent issue in the interviews. It can be argued that this puts into question the widespread negative views of young fathers as feckless, absent or non-committed.

Max was one of the fathers who had moved out of cohabitation and so he could reflect on the change of his role as father. He had lived with his now ex-girlfriend and two sons for 5 of years but at the time of the interview they had recently broken up and he had left. Max talked in a similar way to Kieran about arguing in front of the children and saw it as one of the difficult parts of cohabiting.

What made it easier is just me being able to be there, like when I was there 24/7... but what made it hard maybe it's just the arguments that me and my girl had... in front of them as well, they could see that there were bad vibes, they could see sometimes mummy and daddy weren't getting on, and I didn't really want them to see that.

No, sure... And you know when you say “being able to be there”, what made it possible for you to be able to be there?

Me and my partner was getting along and everything was alright, she was alright, we were both alright and it was much more easier...

(Max, 23. 6 year old son & 3 year old son, non-resident.)

Reflecting on living with his children and the break up, Max pointed out that advantages of living there were that “*you get to see your kids every morning and every night get to play with them more*”. However, there were disadvantages too and that was conflict around bringing up children. This coupled with the way in which “*when she gets stressed out with the kids she'll take it out on me*”, led to arguments. His argument was that what made his role as father easier was being able to be there 24/7. In turn, what made it possible to be there was having a good relationship with his now ex-partner. This resonates with the arguments by Dan at the start of this chapter, who mentioned how still being with his girlfriend made his experience of fatherhood smoother. This may serve as an example of the centrality and importance of a positive father-mother relationship in facilitating the father-child relationship.

The interviews suggest that one of the reasons why young men may be reluctant to move out is due to the perception on the young father's side that leaving the relationship can be equated with not being there for one's child. Moreover, another reason to stay, particularly when the children are young, may be related to the young father's desire to create a long lasting bond with their child(ren). Such feeling possibly emanates from awareness that if they separate they will see their children less. For example, Ryan made the following reflection about a potential break-up from his live-in girlfriend, with whom he was experiencing trouble at the time of the interview.

Right OK. So the reason why you live there, it's..?

For my child.

To have, to see your...

To bond with my child basically because I don't... I would say I don't have a father really, so I don't want to be like my father, I want to be there for my child, I want to bond with my child.

OK and the bonding, how does that happen? What do you do?

I just want to make sure she knows me.

(Ryan 22, 10 month old daughter, resident)

First, Ryan's story is suggestive of the importance that may be given to bonding as a way to secure the relationship and of living with them on day to day basis to pick up and cement that bond. As seen in this section, living away from the children, and the consequent changes to the relationship and their role as fathers, was seen as one of the downfalls from breaking up after cohabiting. Secondly, in the case of Ryan, he told me that he confided in his mother about the relationship problems he was having, and she advised him "*to be strong and be there for my kid*". Research suggests that both the maternal (girlfriend's mother) and the paternal (young father's own mother) grandmothers influence young fathers' involvement in their children's lives. For example, it has been found that maternal grandmothers may discourage young men's involvement in their children's lives (Kalil *et al*, 2005). The role of the paternal grandmother is still under-researched (Reeves and Rehal, 2008). However the limited research has suggested the positive support of the paternal grandmother in encouraging young fathers to keep a relationship with their children (Fagan *et al*, 2007). It can be argued such encouragement may create an expectation on the young father's side that he has to be there. The paradox of the situation is apparent: in many cases, leaving could signify them doing to their children what their fathers did not only to themselves, but also to their own mothers.

7.3.3 Being friends and like a family

One prominent aspect of young men's narratives in relation to the break up was how it changed the nature of the relationship with the now ex-partner, both in a negative and positive ways.

As seen above, arguments were presented as a crucial aspect in the breaking up process, either to consider it or to justify it once that step had been taken. Arguments, however, did not always stop after the relationship broke down and the young father moved out. When arguments continued, they sometimes affected the father-child relationship, either by their losing contact or making contact more infrequent or difficult. There may be two forces at play. First, there is the aforementioned gatekeeper role that young mothers sometimes have, meaning that when conflict is present they may stop the young fathers from seeing their children. Secondly, Florsheim *et al* (1999:197) have suggested that some young fathers “have not yet developed the skills to negotiate interpersonal conflicts associated with parenting”, as they are less mature than older parents. I would say that the same could be applied to young mothers, meaning that young couples may find it difficult to navigate relationship conflict.

For example, Finley was one of the fathers who had a difficult break-up. For a short while, the mother prevented him from seeing the child as a way to avoid arguments but also, he believes, as a way to hurt him. Finley went to court in order to re-gain access to his child and spoke of having shared custody. He also mentioned that his partner “*saw sense*” and realised she was hurting their son. Thus a change in attitude seemed to happen on her side and she allowed visitation rights. This is an example of the power of mothers over allowing contact or not to young fathers. With regard to the relationship he now had with his ex-partner Finley said:

But now, we have a good relationship, a friendly relationship, more like a family relationship, more like a...

Yeah?

Yeah, so we can go out and we can do stuff because it's beneficial for our son.

(Finley, 24. 4 years old son, non-resident)

One of the interesting aspects of Finley's quotes is how he speaks about doing things together because it is “*beneficial to our son*”: this is similar to the breaking up arguments that Kieran and Max used above. Such reasoning re-instates the idea that young fathers can be sensitive to their children's needs and are able to put those before theirs. Examples of putting the child first were also mentioned by young fathers who had never lived with the mother of their child.

There was a minority of young fathers for whom the break-up was a positive experience straight away, without going through the negative phase. In these cases they likened the post-break up relationships to being “*more like a family*” and friendlier than prior to the separation.

I've always had a good relationship with my child, you know, that's always stayed solid and what not, um... Well, I'd say me and the mother get on even better now as friends and what not, and you know, we do things as a family from time to time, like once a month, twice a month.

(Steve 25, 5 years old son, non-resident)

It can be argued that by re-enforcing the sense of family, the young fathers seem to position themselves against discourses of absent fatherhood and broken families, which were discussed in the literature review chapter. Moreover, it can be argued that these affirmations of being a family, despite not being with the partner or co-habiting, challenges the traditional notions of the nuclear family and at the same time are a reflection of new family forms.

7.4 Non-cohabiting fathers

At the time of the interview there were 9 young fathers who had never lived with the mother of their child. Out of these 9, one was in a Living Apart Together arrangement, and two were no longer with their partner. The other 6 were young fathers who were reluctant, or felt unable to make a full commitment to the relationship at present, despite sometimes seeing a future together. Some of these relationships appeared ambiguous: while the young men claimed not to be with their partners, they spoke of the possibility of being together again in the future. Different reasons were given not to cohabit: going to or being at University, the need for space, and not being ready to take up fully the responsibilities of being a live-in father. As argued by Easterbrooks *et al* (2007:218) “for some young men, developing successful intimate relationships and parenting styles while making the transition to adulthood is challenging”. For a number of fathers in this research this appeared to be the case.

7.4.1 “I need my own space sometimes”

A common issue, whether explicitly mentioned or conveyed in the narratives around cohabiting, was the lack of *space*. This was mentioned by fathers who were reluctant to move in with their partner and child, but also other fathers who went on to break up with their girlfriends. What appears interesting is that this feeling of not having enough *space* sometimes seems to relate not just to the actual physical space that the young fathers had in their homes (only one spoke of overcrowding), but to a more psychological dimension. For example, earlier on Kieran mentioned lack of space as creating arguments, however, the interview took place in his own home, and it was a spacious, uncluttered, two bedroom apartment, only inhabited by the couple and their 6 month old son.

Greg was in his second year of university and his girlfriend had been looking after their 3 year old daughter since she was born. His girlfriend was at college part-time and was about

to start a degree the following year. They had only known each other for four months when the conception took place. Greg explained how arguments after the birth of their daughter made him realise that they needed to “take a break”. During this time he has lived on the outskirts of London and he visits his daughter regularly, who lives with his partner (just mother and daughter alone in their own home). Although he was entertaining the idea of moving in with her the year after, he spoke in the following way about the reasons why he did not want to live with them yet.

I need my own space sometimes, I'll feel to cramped up and I'll get angry, agitated if there is too much around me, so obviously if I lived there I'd get agitated, and what's the point if I'm gonna get agitated? I think it's better how it is now. But it's negative 'cos my daughter doesn't see me as much, but I talk to her, as I said, I talk to her, I told her I'm at university, obviously she said, “what's university, dad?” 'cos she don't understand what university is, to the extent that she knows that I'm studying but... she understands, she knows that I'm here like, I'm not running away, I'm not leaving her, I'm just going to university, innit? I was gonna go to America, you know? For a football scholarship...

You were gonna go..?

Yeah, in September, this September but I chose to come here 'cos America is too far I don't wanna be that far away from her you know, so at least if I'm here I can still get to her...

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

Greg is presenting a situation in which he feels unable to live together in what resembles a traditional family, because it may not be beneficial for his daughter and partner. However, this could be his way of justifying his lack of commitment to the mother of his daughter. It may be a reflection as well of how he is not ready to take on the role of father and partner on a full-time basis. Moreover, Greg's narrative is representative of what can be considered one of the recurrent themes in the young men's stories: the ambivalence and contradictions around becoming and being a father. Greg, just like other fathers, presents a situation in which tensions between his own individual needs and that of his daughter have to be negotiated. Moreover, in what can be considered an act of self-presentation and self-reflection, Greg shows that he is aware of the potential negative impact of not being present in the family home on a daily basis. Nevertheless, in an added twist to his story, Greg tells how he renounced going to America, to be closer to his daughter. In this sense, he is balancing the start of his narrative, which can be taken as being highly individualized, with the end, in which he perceives to be making an individual sacrifice in order to be there for his daughter. This was also mentioned by other young fathers.

The difficulty towards making the commitment to live together was also part of Ali's narrative, but in this case it was related to issues of economic provision. Ali was one of the fathers who expressed greater ambivalence towards the relationship with his baby's mother. In fact, while he stated that they were not together as "*she wants to start a family and I am not ready for that*" he also discussed the possibility of moving in together in the future, either in her parents' house or his place, which he shared with just his older brother.

Ok and for the future do you hope that now... you know, like now you see the baby a little bit; do you think it will increase?

Yeah, probably. I think as it grows older I will sort of... we might... I am not sure. Right now as you say the baby is still young, and I am just living every day as it comes. So maybe later on when the baby gets older or like... yeah, when I start work... because now like, we are both like financially unstable so it's not like we can... "So you want to move out with me?" Once you move out... she was like... her dad is going to be like "Um, so you have moved out, you are ready to look after yourself, yeah? He's ready to pay for your rent, he is ready to pay for you and the baby and himself" Really I am really not ready for that.

(Ali, 17. 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

Ali's situation is different from Greg as Ali's ex-partner is still living with her parents. Her dad is supporting her and their daughter economically, as opposed to Greg's baby mother who lived by herself with their daughter²⁶. Ali's situation causes tension in the teenage mother's house as Ali explains that "*the dad's not helping... he is helping in a way like giving her money regularly every week, but he's also having a go at her every week as well*". Moreover, Ali was one of the only fathers who openly expressed how his ex-girlfriend's parents put pressure on him to make a greater commitment to their daughter. He explained, for example, that when he visits "*her mum is trying to talk to me about getting a job and how... when am I going to move in with her daughter, get married to her daughter?*", which makes him discard the option of moving into their house, as his baby's mother sometimes suggests. These conversations make Ali uncomfortable and when he is in the house he tries to avoid being in the same room as his baby mother's parents. In this context, there appears to be one key aspect to Ali's narrative: the taking on of financial responsibility. First, Ali presents his agency to move in with his baby's mother as being curtailed by their economic circumstances. However, straight after the situation is reversed to one in which he feels that if he makes the commitment to move in with his baby's mother, there will be the expectation (in this case from the paternal grandfather) that Ali will be the provider from then on. Moreover, it can be argued that Ali's narrative is instilled with a sense that his agency is under-threat. He goes from "*just living every day as it comes*" to presenting the situation as one in which if he takes the step of fully providing for this child, he will consequently be tied to providing forever. The expectation by people around them, such as maternal grandparents, that once

²⁶ Greg's girlfriend's received benefits.

financial responsibility has been taken on it will be sustained, may make some young men fearful of taking up that responsibility.

Going back to the issue of space, it can be argued that for some young men keeping their own physical sense of space seemed important. This is in fact what one of the young fathers, Eric, was doing. This father was in what can be considered Living Apart Together arrangement: he had his own flat right opposite his girlfriend's place. Even though he spent most of his time at this partner's home, he still kept his own flat. In the extract below I asked him why he chose that particular family set up.

And did you decide to keep your house for any reason? You know, you have got two homes potentially...

Because me and the mum, our relationship is kind of stable. So I didn't like want to just give up my flat and move in and... because I am working now and now I have got more space, you know. My own space I have got there and... when she wants her space I just take the baby and go... we sometimes go out, you know.

OK.

That's important as well, you know.

Yeah, space. It's something that comes up a lot I think in...

Everybody is going to need space because you know a woman who has just had a baby - her hormones are all over the place and they switch for nothing...

(Eric, 24. 6 month old daughter, Living Apart Together)

Eric claimed that he spent most of his time at his partner's flat and slept there every night; however he appears reluctant to give up his space. He gives a few reasons for this. First, he suggests that his relationship is not completely settled, describing it as "*kind of stable*" as well as "*on and off*" in another part of the interview. The threat that the relationship may terminate seems to make him hold on to his own place, not yet wanting to make that full commitment to the relationship.

Just like Greg above, Eric also starts his narrative with an individualistic reflection: his own need for space. However, in the development of his story, he adds the need of his partner for space too. In this sense, it appears that he is justifying his decision to maintain his own home, and the safety this provides, as a beneficial thing for both parties. Such arguments move him away again from more individualistic discourses of the needs of the father, towards more altruistic attitudes, just like Greg did. Thus indecisions around living together may also be related to the loss of autonomy and own space that taking that step may potentially entail. However, there may be other undisclosed reasons around the benefit system, as they were both on council homes and moving in together may alter their benefits. In this sense, and as

mentioned earlier, there may be unspoken economic motives behind the way in which young fathers and their partners make their living arrangements.

7.5 Conclusion

With 17 fathers out of 22 not being resident but involved nevertheless, it can be argued that amongst this group of men, residency did not seem to have a strong effect in determining whether they had a relationship with their child or not. This is in accord with previous research that has found that residency status may not be the most defining factor in care giving and involvement when it comes to young fathers (Fagan *et al*, 2007). Indeed, at the time of the interview, all the participants had a relationship with their children and saw them regularly. However, non-residence may affect the way in which a young father can care for his child, but this finding is not yet conclusive (Bunting and McAuley, 2004). The important thing is that resident or not, the young fathers managed to stay involved in their children's lives. In this sense they were fulfilling their desire to *be there* as many of them expressed not only in the course of this study, but also in most previous research (Speak, 2006; Reeves, 2006).

Decisions around when and how to commit seemed personal rather than marked by social norms as to how things should be done. Thus, it can be argued that the process of moving in together appeared to be more influenced by a series of contextual factors. The influence of social norms as to what the *right thing to do* is when getting a girl pregnant or family pressure to get married or cohabit was only mentioned by one father, Ali. This may be a reflection of the lessening of social-cultural norms and wider societal processes, particularly in relation to marriage after conceiving a child. However, some young men did start cohabiting with the mother as a result of the pregnancy or birth.

The interviews suggest that cohabitation coupled with fatherhood was not an easy time for a number of fathers with conflicting issues arising in the process. Adjusting to being the economic provider can be regarded as one of the most challenging parts of becoming a father and a family man, especially when the children are very young and the couple cohabits. New childcare routines and less time for oneself were mentioned as issues that were difficult to adapt to.

For a number of men who were cohabiting with their baby's mother, the experience was proving challenging and as a result conflict was part of their daily lives. In this sense, losing contact with the child was seen as a motive to re-think a break up and stay in the family home. Arguing in front of the children, and the potential negative effects it can have on them was seen as a good reason to justify a break-up after cohabiting. Moreover, it appears that those fathers that perceived their relationships as conflictual also perceived breaking up

as beneficial. Finally, keeping the sense of family seemed particularly important for some fathers. This applied both to fathers who had broken up with their partners, as well as for those who were not in a stable relationship with the mother.

For those young men whose father had not been around on a full-time basis this translated into a strong desire to *be there* for their children. Being there was one of their main concerns however they often were not prepared to take on full economic responsibility straight away.

One important point to make is that what is missing from the narratives presented in this chapter is the mothers' view point. Thus for example, in this last section, the young men talk about their reasons why they do not want to move in (yet) with the mother of their child. On other occasions, the young men spoke of breaking up due to arguments and tensions. However, we do not know whether it was actually the case that the young mothers were reluctant to move in with the young fathers, or that they did no longer want to cohabit with them. Whitehead (2008:294) found that teenage mothers' "ambitions and aspirations are rooted in some 'traditional family values' namely to have the father of her child in paid work, giving her stability and social standing". She further argues when the young fathers were unable to provide, they were seen as "dependent children themselves and not worthy of maintaining a relationship" (Whitehead, 2008:149). It is important then to remember that these narratives are partial, and in some ways incomplete, as they just present the situations from the point of view of the young men. The way in which their partners or ex-partners may narrate them differently has to be acknowledged.

Above all, what became apparent is that all young fathers (but one, Ashton) in this research tried to have and maintain a relationship with their child. This sometimes was in difficult circumstances and against a variety of hurdles, including tensions with their partner or ex-partner. Overall, the desire to be there relates to the idea of being a family, whatever forms it takes, wanting to bond with the child and wanting to be the man in the child's life. Moreover, a central argument is that, unlike other research (Arai, 2009), attachment to the child was not dependent on, or always mediated via, attachment to the mother.

Chapter 8: “*If he is away from this type of environment then there’s no way he can go wrong*”: young fathers’ reflections on neighbourhoods and networks, fatherless upbringings and societal perceptions of their roles

This chapter explores the themes of neighbourhoods, role models and children’s upbringings, which appeared central to the narratives constructed in the course of the interviews. This chapter thus deals with the role of the social and familial background and context in the participants’ lives, both as young men as well as fathers. There are two reasons to include such a chapter. First, the importance of place in young men’s lives and trajectories and in their role as fathers became apparent during the interviews. Indeed, this was one of the issues that repeatedly came up, with many young men talking about their experiences of growing up in certain locales. This may denote the importance of context and environment, and even class as MacDonald and Marsh (2005) would argue, in the experiences of growing up as well as in parenting. Secondly, it can be argued that young fatherhood is often explored from, and linked to, social exclusion perspectives, as seen in the literature review chapter. However, in the case of this research, as the stories of the young fathers unfolded, I came to realise that those perspectives were not necessarily representative of the participants. Social capital was seen as an alternative, more appropriate lens, by which to investigate the lives of these young men and their perception of their fathering role

This chapter has three sections. The first section investigates how the young fathers spoke about the environments and communities in which they grew up, and how they perceived it affected their life trajectory. The second part of the first section returns to the exploration of young men as fathers. The young men reflected on the influence that certain environments and role models could have on their children’s upbringing. This second part explores how young fathers spoke about what they believed were risky environments for their children and the strategies they planned in order to protect them.

The second section explores the impact of not having had a father, either because the father was absent or was not greatly involved in their upbringing. In general terms it can be argued that father absence motivated these young men to be there for their children. However, what is relevant to point out is that it was not only an issue of growing up without a father, but also the perception of the quality of fathering received that mattered. It is argued that not having a constant father figure made it difficult for the young fathers to have clear parameters by which to judge the father role. Thus fear of not being a good father may be related to the way in which fathering standards have not been set for them. As a result, young fathers may set high expectations of themselves. This section then moves to exploring the positive impact that some friendships had on young fathers.

Finally, in most cases fathering is not just done privately but also has a public and social dimension which has received little attention in the literature. The experience of fathering outside the confines of the home was one of the issues that some of the young fathers brought up as influencing their experience of fatherhood. It is for this reason that the third section of this chapter is dedicated to exploring this issue. The final part of this last section is young fathers' narratives of the attitudes of health and social work professionals towards them.

8.1 Young fathers' reflections on their neighbourhoods, role models and networks

Most of the fathers in this study either grew up or live in Hackney, a borough in London which counts as one of the most disadvantaged in England. According to the latest statistics from the English Indices of Deprivation, Hackney was the second deprived local authority in England (English Indices of Deprivation, 2010). Those young fathers who were not from Hackney came from North West London, two from Tower Hamlets and one from South-East London. However, fathers from all boroughs spoke similarly about the places where they grew up or where they currently lived, pointing at comparable backgrounds and experiences despite different geographical locales.

The majority of the young men that spoke about their upbringing did not portray the neighbourhoods where they spent their childhood and/or early teenage years, in a positive light. They were often presented as negative environments conducive to getting into trouble. From a social capital perspective, it can be said that these young men's perceptions were that their neighbourhoods often offered poor networks that were generally not beneficial to one's development. As Field (2003:74) explains, "everyone can use their connections as a way of advancing their interest, but some people's connections are more valuable than others". Despite this, some of the young fathers spoke of positive and strong friendships which were helpful when growing up and which they kept after becoming fathers. This helped balance the account and showed that young men from socially excluded background can have access, albeit limited, to positive resources.

8.1.1 Poor networks and negative role models

Many of the young men who took part in this study reported having flirted with drugs, crime or 'antisocial' behaviour. While most of them did not appear to get involved in serious criminal activities, three of the young fathers did. Mason and Enam went to prison for 10 months and 8 months respectively after becoming fathers. Another participant, Ashton, was involved in "gang warfare" and drug dealing, which was reportedly the main reason why the mother of his daughter had not allowed him to meet the baby. Ashton spoke about how he got involved in gangs and drug dealing in the following way:

I lived on an estate, in a council estate in Hackney and then basically what it was is... as I was getting older, I used to hang around with kids like... there was a group of kids - that's exactly what it was - a group of kids on the estate and in fact we used to play football, we used to mess around, we went out and stuff like that, but then it evolved into stealing motorbikes and driving motorbikes around the area and then we sort of saw the older lot looking like... with loads of money, like loads of power and all the girls, cars, everything... that's what the drug money... like that's what we saw, it's drug money and with me, that's what got me into it, and then we got in too deep in it and we started getting arrested and stuff like for stupid things like arm robbery, from the damage and that, but then I just, you know... that wasn't the life for me. You only live once and if you do that all your life, you are limiting yourself to one estate... all this postcode thing, you are limiting yourself to one estate or one postcode.

(Ashton, 18. 10 month old daughter, no contact)

Ashton starts his recounting of events by pointing out that he grew up in an estate, then clarifying where that estate was: Hackney. Framing the story of his criminal career in a place known for its deprivation, high crime rates and drugs culture (Audit Commission, 2006) cannot be taken as an accidental mention. Rather, it can be argued that he is placing his story in a certain setting to suggest that the place itself was conducive to getting involved in gangs and drug dealing. The importance of the environment or context in his story then becomes clear from the beginning.

The trajectory between “*playing football*” and “*messing about*” to arm robberies is not straightforward. As he explained, it “*evolved*” into a period of petty criminal activity. A bridging factor between “*stealing motorbikes*” and getting into more serious crimes are the “*older lot*” as Ashton explains²⁷. A key element in Ashton’s story is therefore the older generation, who is portrayed as having a negative influence, as they are the ones initially involved in drug dealing and acted as (negative) role models for Ashton and his friends. MacDonald and Marsh (2005:881) call the participating in criminal networks “destructive social capital” and in Ashton’s case this is the main type of social capital he had access to.

When it comes to young fathers generally, it can be argued that the negative influences of living in certain environments, whether the young father got involved in more serious crime or not, were partly blamed on the people that inhabited them. Thus, blaming being in the wrong crowd or with the wrong people was common amongst the young fathers. This point towards what Field (2003:72) calls the “dark side of social capital”, which essentially works

²⁷ I would like to point out here how my use the term “serious crimes” can be contrasted to his referring to arm robbery as a “stupid thing”, showing his rating of crime as being very different from mine.

to either support inequality or to facilitate antisocial behavior. In relation to inequality Field (2003) argues how “social capital can promote inequality in large part because access to different types of networks is very unequally distributed” (Field, 2003:74). In this sense, it is argued that people from deprived or poorer neighbourhoods have access to role models and connections that are weaker and less beneficial than those of more affluent backgrounds. This is in tune with Bourdieu’s (1977) ideas of social capital as reinforcing inequality explored in chapter 3. This is the type of negative social capital that may go often unnoticed, but that can potentially shape the lives of young people growing up in deprived neighbourhoods. However, as will be seen later many of the young fathers spoke of stopping some friendships after becoming fathers due to their perceived negative influences. This suggests that young people can exercise a degree of agency and choice within the restrictions that their environment may place in their lives. Indeed, as Boeck (2007:5) argues, young people as “‘active agents’ means that as individuals they have the possibility and the freedom to create, change and influence events within their life transitions”. However, research on youth transitions has pointed out at the limitations that structure places on the individual. To explain this Evans *et al*, (2001:16-17) developed the concept of *bounded agency*, which looks at “agency as a socially situated process, shaped by the experiences of the past, the chances present in the current moment and the perception of possible futures”. It can be argued that it is too represented by Ashton’s concluding remarks about the restriction of being bound to one’s neighbourhood, which in turn also resonates with the concept of bonding and bridging social capital discussed on page 55.

Similarly, the idea of bounded agency can be applied to the way in which Enam spoke about growing up in England. Although he was originally from Africa, he placed his story in a specific place, but this time not a neighbourhood, but a country: England. Enam appears to partly blame growing up in England as the cause for his involvement in crime and drugs.

My dad never went to the street but I didn't live with my dad for long, but he was never a street guy. My dad was never a street person but I ended up there because of the fact that I grew up in England, which is my life, but I can't really blame that 'cos it's all up to me... but now I see the difference of, how a child can make that difference, but some obviously follow that life... but not because you are from England and because you live in England you have to follow the stereotypes or you have to do certain things... that's the difference I'm trying to make with my son...

So stereotypes like street culture..?

Yeah street culture and then “oh because I'm black' I have to do this...

[unclear]

Did you feel like that?

Mmm... I didn't feel like that [unclear] but the fact that the people I grew up with everybody was smoking and drinking so I thought it was just normal.

(Enam, 24. 4 years old son, non-resident.)

Enam presents his dad as a possible positive role model, because he was someone “*who was never on the streets*” However, he quickly says that he did not actually live with his dad for long, implying that the impact that his dad could have had was actually limited, if existent at all. Enam thus introduces the idea of the potential protective function that his dad could have had in his life, had he been present. The experience of not growing up with a constant father figure, or having poor relationships with them, is a recurrent theme in the lives of young fathers, as explored later in this chapter.

What is significant in Enam’s narrative is the way in which his reasoning behind why he ended up on the streets becomes muddled. He mixes feelings of victimisation towards his surroundings but also draws on issues of personal agency and decision making. There is therefore an apparent tension between the influence of place on the individual, and the ability of that individual to overcome those influences. The aforementioned concept of “bounded agency” was developed to explain such tensions. This concept conveys the idea that young adults can feel a sense of agency but that “there are a number of boundaries or barriers which circumscribe and sometimes prevent the expression of agency” (Evans *et al*, 2001:17). This was also apparent in other young fathers’ stories, and may be partly fed by the discourse put forward by many of the policy makers on youth transitions, which as argued by Boeck (2007:5) are “framed around the notions of individual choice and the taking up of opportunities”. The danger of this, Boeck (2007:5) continues is that young people end up “viewed as essentially responsible for the situations in which they find themselves”. Thus, it can be argued that although there was a degree of agency and free choice in the lives of these young fathers, this does not negate the existence of socio-structural constraints and influences.

Finally, Enam turns to social stereotyping as a way to explain his entrapment in illicit activities: it is the following of stereotypes that needs overcoming. He draws on race and class discourses in order to illustrate his point. Despite the fact that all the young men in this study came from what would be considered an ethnic minority background there was little explicit mention of that in their accounts of it having a social influence²⁸, in the way that Enam did. This could be due to the fact that most of these young men grew up in Hackney, an area with a large ethnic minority population, including black African and black Caribbean. The latest census showed that 36% of respondents described themselves as white British, and 16% as white other. The total population describing themselves as black African, British, Caribbean and other was 48% (ONS, 2011). It may also be related to my caucasian ethnic background, which may have not inspired them to bring up that subject. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

28 When ethnic or country of origin was mentioned it was done in relation to cultural influences.

One important point is the way in which Ashton and Enam, as well as many other fathers in this study, mentioned one of the most talked about issues in relation to both youthful fatherhood and young men growing up in deprived neighbourhoods: that of role models. The lack of male role models, particularly fatherly ones, is a subject that it is most talked about in the literature surrounding young fathers. It is known that young fathers are less likely to have lived with both natural parents (Kiernan, 1995; Quinton *et al*, 2002) which means that many of them grew up without a constant father figure or sometimes without a male role model. In accord with other research, it was common for fathers in this research to have grown up without regular contact with their father, and thus the issue of ‘fatherless’ upbringings is a constant one. In some cases this had an effect on how young fathers created attachments with their friends as will be seen in section two of this chapter.

8.1.2 Neighbourhoods’ risks and the father role: “If you grew up in a certain area you are gonna be a certain way”

It can be argued that young fathers’ experiences of fathering were influenced by their experience of growing up in certain locales. A number of young fathers from this research reflected both on the potential effects that the environment can have on young people generally as well as on their child specifically. It appears that in their act of self-reflection, the young fathers were actually re-visiting their past with a “fatherhood lens”. In this sense, they were identifying potential threats and risks that they had been exposed to when growing up. These risks were often the ones which they believed could affect their children’s well-being and life chances in the future. In this sense it can be argued that they were making links between the environments in which they grew up, their experiences of growing up there and their role as fathers. Thus they were making links between the past, the present and the future. There were two influences that the young men spoke about: the influence of people and networks and socio-structural influences. In relation to other people’s influence this was related to negative influences as well as access to poorer or destructive social capital. This section deals with two issues: fathers’ perceptions of potential environmental threats on their children and the possible protective strategies.

For example, Abiola, father to a two month old baby, was one of the men who brought up the subject of his neighbourhood and negative role models or influences. He spoke about it when I asked him about whether he had an idea about the type of father he wanted be.

I am kind of laid back, but like I have seen so much things around me like negatives stuff like...that I wouldn't want my child to be involved in that sort...I believe I'll be kind of like a freelance kind of person, I'll be laid back with my child but that's it, I am setting the rules so that they know what is right and what's wrong.

Right... kind of negatives?

There's that... because in the area I live on...

Where do you live?

I live in Hackney... There's lot of young kids there and lots of sort of fighting, selling drugs, beating up people, all this stabbing/shooting; I don't want my child to be involved in none of that. I want to make sure that he's raised properly, like he knows what's right, what's wrong, what kind of friends are good, what kind of friends ain't good.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old son, non-resident)

Abiola provides a list of the issues that young people in his area are involved in and that he finds problematic, which are violence, drug dealing and killings. However, those issues are not a risk *per se* and he presents friendships playing a big role. Equally, the idea that other young people pose a risk for their children's future well-being and development was common amongst some of the young fathers in this research. It is argued by Huges (2011:391-392) that "policy in England illustrates a discourse concerned with the risk to society caused by young people exhibiting anti-social behaviour...[they] are predominantly perceived as 'a risk'. Interestingly the discourses of young people as a risk were often used by the fathers too. It can be argued that in the same way young fathers believed that their peers posed a risk by influencing them, they perceived other young people as a potential threat to their own children. Shared values are an important part of social capital theories, and the centrality of this in terms of socializing with the right people was apparent in the young fathers' stories.

However, what is interesting to see is that Abiola believes in the potential positive networks of friends that his child can draw from in the future. He relies in his skills as a father in order to protect his child and instill in him the values to make the right choices. This was one of the strategies that some fathers who did not want to leave their neighbourhood were planning to employ. For this reason it can be argued that some young men felt capable of creating their own social capital, which is one of the issues explored in the theory chapter. Indeed, it was argued that one of the issues with social capital theories, particularly those of the so-called theoretical fathers, Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, is that they largely viewed young people as recipients of their parents' social capital. As explained earlier, the paradox with young fathers is that they are located in the young person category, due to their age, and in the parent group, due to their parental status. Another strategy that young fathers in this research used to create social capital was keeping their children away from negative networks or wanting to place them in environments that they deemed safer. For example Mark spoke in the following way about his son's upbringing:

I'll hate to raise my son around here and then having him doing things that I was doing at a young age... like I used to hang around with friends, just standing on the road, you know what I mean?

Right, like what?

Like maybe just standing on the corner of the road, talking to friends, and stuff like that I'd rather Liam be doing, you know like I'd rather Liam be doing something else at that age, maybe driving a car, or working or something, you know what I mean?

Right.

And I think, if he is away from this type of environment then there's no way he can go wrong basically... you know. Influence, that's the major thing when you live in a neighbourhood, somebody is always influenced by somebody or someone is always influenced by something they see...

(Mark, 23. 7 year old son, resident)

When the young fathers engaged in this process of reflection on the past (how they grew up), to assess the present (their role as fathers and their children's lives) and evaluate the future (their children's well-being and life chances) the principles of structuration theory can be applied. As explained in chapter 3, Giddens (1984) sees humans as reflexive, both at the subconscious and conscious level. Subconscious reflexivity provides the everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge necessary to function in society. Conscious reflexivity allows people to revise new incoming information in a discursive manner, forming the basis for their reasons to act. As has been seen in this chapter, the young men engage in a process of reflection about their past lives, which is provoked by their fatherhood status. This reflection does not stop at the abstract level, but they may act on it by for example taking up education, steering away from crime or leaving some friendships behind. In addition, in the process of reflecting on their life trajectory after becoming fathers, the young men are not only changing their lives but potentially that of their children. This serves as an example of the potential for change in one's circumstances that reflexivity offers, as explained by O'Donnell (2003) above. On a societal level it can be related to the ability that agents have of changing things at the structural level via their actions. As was explained in the theory chapter, with their action, humans have the power to be transformative, even in an unintentional way.

It was mentioned earlier that young people in England are often perceived as a risk. However, another discourse in relation to young people is that they are "at risk" (Huges, 2011:388). In this sense, from the view above we can say that young people were portrayed as a risk to their children's future development, due to their potential negative influence. However, the oldest fathers of the group also used the discourse of young fathers as being "at risk". For example, Steve, a 25 year old father of a 5 year old boy, spoke about young people and risk in the following way

Him growing up in Hackney or... How do you see the future? Because at the moment, you know, you...

The only thing that I worry about is, you know, there's a lot of youths nowadays on um... drugs are a big thing out here or on the streets or whatever and there's not a lot to do for the kids, and you know, we are

all pressured into working in society and I went out to work and you know, it's just showing your kids that time and attention that they need and just [unclear] just like stress through your life, there isn't actually the hours in the day, you know what I mean, to actually do it? And um ... I mean a lot of the kids have just fallen victim to drugs and crime and what not, you know what I mean? And the system is failing us really, I reckon as kids and what not. There's a lot of young people become parents, do you know what I mean? They ain't prepared for it and you know...

(Steve, 25. 5 year old son, non-resident)

Steve is drawing on discourses of risk, and he portrays young people as being *at risk*, as he explains how young people having fallen “*victims to drugs and crime*”. He introduces specific elements to the discourse of risk: taking drugs as well as teenage pregnancy. He blames all these threats on three aspects: lack of leisure resources for young people, lack of time on the parents’ side and the failure of “*the system*”. In this sense, Steve is talking about the socio-structural influences on young people and not limiting the responsibility to parenting alone. In terms of parenting, Steve paints a picture of the difficulties to juggle being a parent and having a working life, drawing on discourses of work-life balance that are common amongst older parents. As one of the oldest fathers that I interviewed, he’d just turned 25, Steve actively engaged in distancing himself from young people. This however, can also be seen in Saleem’s extract above, and he is only 19. It is possible that when the young fathers speak about other young people, they are actually talking from the perspective of being a father, not of being a young person. This may indicate the extent to which they have taken on the identity or role of father. In turn, taking on board the identity of father may entail a changing of values. This means that they may no longer be in accord with those of their networks or social settings. Indeed, Hogan (2001) defines social capital as “as the weaving of interpersonal relationships and values within families and in their communities” (Hogan, 2001:151). The changing values as a result of fatherhood may mean that there are no longer shared values with their communities and networks.

The potential influence of the environment on children’s development was seen as something that was inescapable for some young fathers. For example, Greg and Mark spoke in the following ways about this issue.

I enjoyed growing up there, yeah. Cos my people are there, innit? But, I live a different life that I want her to live, yeah? obviously a better life.

What kind of life do you want her to live?

A good life. I wanna...

What’s a good life?

Ok. When I say good life I wanna life where...’cos obviously when I was younger I had to, certain times when was going out, it was always pro-

tection time you know?... you have to... protection and stuff. I want her to feel comfortable when she goes out, I want her... 'cos... Everyone, in life, yeah, you are a product of your environment; you are who you are innit? from your area, so obviously, if she is in a certain area, she may be in a certain way. Obviously... obviously I am not saying, I am not naïve to say that if you live in a certain area you are definitely gonna be that way, but...

There are more chances?

Yeah, yeah... if you grew up in a certain area you are gonna be a certain way. In my area I don't want her to grew up there, because she is gonna be a certain... I know certain girls in my area, like... I just don't want her to be like them. It's just they don't have their heads screwed or nothing. Obviously, if she was away from that, but I still educate her about it, I am never gonna take her away from that because that is the real, the reality of life, innit?

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

Basically when it comes to them, I would like them to be somewhere where it's just peaceful and calm you know what I mean? If we have to come back down here, we'll all come back down here together, we can visit family or something but I wouldn't wanna be around here for the rest of my life, you know what I mean? it's hard enough having a child round here.

(Mark, 23. 7 year old son, resident)

What is interesting between Greg and Mark's quotes is that despite the fact that Greg had left the neighbourhood and had a "better life", and Mark had to still fulfill his intention of moving his family somewhere more "fieldish" (as he says in another part of the interview), both wanted their children to live elsewhere. In the case of Greg, he compares it to his new life. However, the tension between the old life and the new one becomes apparent in the description provided of his daughter's future. While, Greg wants to keep his daughter away from his old neighbourhood, he still wants her to know about it as this is the "real life". This may be his way to resolve the dilemma of leaving his old life and neighbourhood behind, to find a way in which he can reconcile the two. In the case of Mark, he compares it to his past and his experience of growing up in a deprived neighbourhood.

Thus, generally there was a sense of dissatisfaction about the communities in which the young fathers either grew up or currently lived in. It is important to notice that, most fathers were engaged in thinking about possible strategies to protect their children from any of their perceived dangers. This engagement in future thinking can be taken as an indicative that there is an intention to continue *being there*.

8.2 *“I wanted to be opposite to my dad”*: The influence of young men’s experiences of being fathered (or not) and the positive influence of friendships

As explained earlier, all the young fathers from this research described themselves as being from what is considered ethnic minority backgrounds (see page 92): 10 described themselves as Black Caribbean, 6 as Black African while the rest gave their background as mixed (Mixed white & black Caribbean, mixed race and mixed Black & Asian). None of the young fathers were solely Caucasian. It can be argued that one of the areas in which ethnic background appears to have a strong impact on young fathers’ lives is the issue of absent fatherhood. Research has shown that around 64% of African Caribbean children in Great Britain grow up in single parent households mostly headed by women. In fact young men of African and Caribbean descent are twice as likely to live in a single parent household as their white counterparts (Platt, 2009). When it comes to this study, the young men could be divided in two groups: those with non-resident fathers who did not represent a constant father figure (16) and those who had a relationship with their fathers, who may or may not be resident fathers for all or some of their childhood (6)²⁹.

The relationship, level of contact and closeness between the young fathers and their own dads were varied and not straightforward. This could be related to the ethnic background of the young fathers, with most of them being (sometimes partly) from Black African or Caribbean descent. It is argued by Reynolds (2009) that when looking at African and Caribbean fathering practices and identities, the historical and cultural contexts of these particular groups need to be taken into account. As she explains,

the fact that fathering -and its associated demonstration of fertility- is regarded as important sign of masculinity is not related to absence or presence but rather reflects the deeply structured dimensions of gender norms within this culture (Reynolds, 2009:23)

In this sense, the young fathers’ experiences of being fathered and the family forms in which they grew up need to be understood under those cultural codes and practices. Thus having a non-resident father does not mean that the young men did not know their fathers. Indeed, the majority of the 16 men who grew up with an absent biological father reported that they knew their fathers from their childhood, while another one met him for the first time as a teenager. However, despite knowing their fathers, these young men generally spoke of having non-existent or poor relationships with them. Therefore, they did not report being close to their fathers. In some cases there may have been physical distance too, with two young men stating that their dads stayed in Africa and another one’s father lived in the north

²⁹ Information was missing for one father who did not mention anything about his father or mother. He was originally from Cape Verde but grew up in France.

of England. In other cases, the young men may reject having a relationship with their fathers as teenagers, usually from a sense of abandonment. From the six young fathers who reported having had a relationship with their dad, only one (Finley) spoke negatively about his father. What is remarkable about the narratives of all these young men is that regardless of the type of relationship they had with their fathers, whether positive or negative, only one (Akram) spoke about them as being the person they looked up to.

8.2.1 Father absence and young men's desire to be there

From the interviews, it can be said that the young men's experiences of being fathered influenced them on at least two levels. First, in their determination to "be there" for their children once they learn about, and come to terms with, their impending fatherhood. Secondly, the quality of their parenting as they develop and establish a relationship with their child(ren) was also often influenced either by the absence of their father or by the type of fathering they received (Dermott, 2008).

In relation to wanting to be there, Max, Greg and Enam, three young fathers who grew up without their biological fathers spoke in the following way about wanting to be there for their children.

Did you have any idea about the kind of dad you wanted to be once you found out that...

I wanted to be opposite to my dad.

Right... Which means?

Make sure I am there for them, I am being involved... because I know the effects that can be not having a dad around.

(Max 23. 6 & 3 year old sons, non-resident)

From a young age I matured quickly you know. All I've done, is cos I never had my dad about, innit?

Ok

So I knew that I had to be there for her. So as soon as she come, I knew that I need to...

(Greg 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

So when the child came along I was there thinking what's going? my world's been turned upside down, but then it made me strong 'cos I realised that ok, I want this child I always cried about my dad not being there for me, I want to be there for my child, I want to make a difference

(Enam, 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

One of the commonalities from the excerpts above, which were also present in the narratives of other young men, was the reflection on their own life and background, and how this was then applied to thinking about their role as fathers. This can be related to the practice of “discursive consciousness” from structuration theory. As explained in chapter 3, Giddens believes that all agents are knowledgeable and have 3 levels of mental activity: the practical, the discursive and the unconscious³⁰. The unconscious is used by Giddens (1984:44) as a way to acknowledge the “significance of unconscious sources of cognition and motivation”. In this sense, as Tuffin *et al* (2010:494) argue,

this major life event [fatherhood] sees these young men catapulted into the world of adult responsibility and their response is to take up the discourses of responsibility and intergenerational repair.

Becoming a father can indeed be taken as a disruptive live event that gives young men the opportunity to critically reflect on their background and upbringing. As most of the participants grew up in single-mother households, they critically reflected on that situation and took up alternative positions. This process of reflection may be important in understanding why for some young men not having had a father around made them more determined to be there for their children. Moreover, the young men in this research, like Tuffin *et al* (2010) argue, take up discourses of responsibility, which I would argue stand in opposition to the discourses which young men are judged by, such as being feckless and absent (Duncan, 2007). Of importance also is the discourse of *intergenerational repair*. Such discourse relates to “the way in which adolescent fathers talked about repairing the deficits of their own childhood” (Tuffin *et al*, 2010:493), which in this case involves wanting to *be there* for them. It may also mean wanting to give their children the material things that some of the young fathers may have not had when growing up. This was mentioned by some fathers, particularly in relation to future provision.

So what do you want for your future and your child? You know, because you have done a degree, what, you know, after..?

And then after I get my degree, the field that I'm going into... is not a very fun field, it's a boring field but the money is very good. Straight 9-5 - and some nice money.

OK.

You just keep your baby... give my baby everything I didn't have.

OK.

When I was... my family weren't well off when I was young.

(Ryan, 22. 10 month old daughter, resident)

30 Practical consciousness is related to the routines, and is the type of knowledge that people use to go through daily life. In a sense, this can be thought of as taken-for granted social and cultural norms and rules from which individuals draw from in order to function in society. Discursive consciousness comes into being when routines are disrupted, and individuals need to reflect on the practical consciousness, that is, the taken for granted knowledge as well as their situation.

It can be argued that when young men reject the idea of absent fatherhood and decide to take up the opposite role, they are in fact contributing to changing that same structure they are part of. This can be taken as an example of the micro-macro connection in structuration theory which was mentioned in page 38. Indeed, the way in which they contribute to changing the structure is via their everyday practices, by playing a role in their children's lives and being involved on a practical level. By doing so, young fathers can become more present and visible in their communities and society at large in a more positive way.

In relation to absent fatherhood, one of the issues that have been pointed out is that growing up without a father may make young men ill-equipped to be fathers themselves (Tyrer *et al*, 2005). The idea in simple terms is that, if young men did not have a strong father role themselves, how can they know how to be a father? It can be argued that although this was brought up by a minority of participants it is an important issue. The importance lays in the way by which some of the deficits of having an absent father may negatively impact on their parenting role.

I was... obviously it was a big thing for me being a dad, so I was a bit excited, so I was there like every day, I just couldn't believe that I was a dad - it was very surprising to me and I've always wanted to be a good dad, because like being the person I am, my dad wasn't there, so I don't know...

Your dad was..?

My dad was not there to raise me, so I don't know how it is to be like a father, but I always said I will be a good father.

(Saleem, 22. 2 year old son, resident)

I mean just the fear of not being a good father in general, you know, not being able to provide all the things for him that I missed out in my childhood because you know, my family don't come from, you know... come from a middle class background and what not, and you know, I've experienced some of the struggles and what not that... I mean my mother's a single mother and what not, so I've experienced some of the struggles and I haven't had a father around, so all I want to do is be a good father, you know. When I actually had the opportunity to become one, I wanted to be the best father in the world, and in the beginning the money seemed an issue to me or what not, not having money and not working and now knowing what direction I was going in my life.

(Steve, 25. 5 year old son, non-resident)

Not having had a father around sometimes added to the feeling of unpreparedness that the young men reported. The lack of a father role model may bring two clashing feelings: on the one hand, the desire to be there, on the other the fear of not being able to be a competent father. Despite this, it can be argued that the influence of not having had a constant father

figure may not necessarily affect the quality of parenting amongst young men. However, what it may do is create unrealistic or higher expectations as to what the role of the father ought to be. It may also mean that young fathers set up very high expectations of themselves, as exemplified by the expression above of wanting to be the “*best father in the world*”. In short, what young fathers may be missing is strategies or parameters by which to measure what good fatherhood is and examples of good practice. This in turn may feed the feeling of unpreparedness felt by some young men and add to the stress of fatherhood.

The young men who had grown up with their biological fathers around spoke about specific dimensions of fathering they would do differently. In contrast, those young men who had grown up with absent fathers spoke of a general notion being *good fathers*. It can thus be argued that one difference between young men who had grown up with fathers and those who hadn't may be the exposure to fathering examples. These examples may in turn give young fathers certain parameters which help them define their parenting role.

I always said I'm going to tell my child that because that's one thing that I never got, I never got... I don't think I got that much... because like my mum, my mum was really the main breadwinner of the family; like my dad was there but my dad wasn't really a big part of that, he was... like I say, my dad did good for us, he was there and I respect him for that, but he never helped pull the weight, he never did nothing, he never said 'Son, sit down and read a book with me' or... The only thing I got from my dad was punishment. If there was a time that you did something wrong, that's all he did, so I don't really have that sort of respect... I think that's why me and my dad are not so close now because he never showed us no emotion or no love, and that's one thing I think... I didn't know my dad, my dad wouldn't... I said 'One thing, if your dad's there, your dad's there but not doing nothing... to me if he's there and not doing nothing, he might as well not be there. 'I'm there' - but you might as well not be there. So that's the way I looked at it and I said 'I'm not going to be the same father like my... I'm not going to be a father like that' so I always said I'm going to encourage him and stuff. If you tell someone something from young, they're gonna be that. You know what I'm saying? If you tell them 'You're a genius, you're so intelligent, you're smart', he's going to be intelligent, he's going to be intelligent, you know what I'm saying? Because he's going to believe that and once you believe certain things, that's what I realised... a lot of people can't do things because they're not confident enough to do things, if you know what I'm saying. Once you're confident enough to do something and you can believe that you can do it, like, then they will do it.

(Finley, 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

The quote above is representative of two points that were felt by many young fathers. First, it was vital not just to be there, but to also play an active role in the upbringing of the child.

This included, actively caring, playing, educating and disciplining them. Secondly, the type and quality of parenting from their fathers was a motivation to do things differently. This takes us to two important issues. In the first place, as Finley points out, the lack of active father involvement in his upbringing gave him less confidence in himself. This resonates with societal concerns of the effects of growing up without a father amongst young under-privileged men. However, and contrary to those discourses that problematise youthful fatherhood, the lack of father involvement appears to motivate young men, to be there and to be involved, thus closing the circle in a positive way.

Finally, one relevant aspect is the parameters that Finley sets as a result of reflecting on the type of his experiences of growing up with a present but not involved father. These are: providing, educating and showing emotion. As Kay (2009:7) argues “men are responding to the changing expectations of what a father might be by parenting differently, becoming more emotionally connected to their children, more directly engaged in their children’s lives and more egalitarian in their gender role expectations”.

It can be argued that in fact, these were common to most men in this research and may relate to wider societal trends.

8.2.2 “All my friends they are all brothers”

Although generally the young fathers spoke of the detrimental influence of others and the lack of solid role models as main reasons why they may have ended up getting into trouble or into crime, there were some that could draw positively on friendships. For example, departing from the negative role models narratives, Greg, a 21 year old father of a 3 year old girl, talked about the issue in a different manner. He presented his friends as a positive influence in his life.

She adopted me at the age of six³¹? Seven? Six? Something like that so I grew up like that, I’ve never had no role model really except for my people around me, my boys. That’s how I grew up. I grew up on the roads, in the streets. That’s how it was, when I grew up. Me and my boys got together, innit?

Riiight. So more like your friends?

Yeah, you see, all my friends they are all brothers...

Is that how it feels to you?

Yeah...

If you are in trouble...

It’s not an issue, we are all together.

31 Greg was adopted by his mother’s best friend (for reasons unknown to me) as a child. She lived in a neighbourhood right next to where Greg was living with his mother. At the time of the interview Greg was in contact both with his adoptive and biological mothers.

Yeah sure.

We are all alive. Cos we grew up together, been through lots of stuff, you know what I mean? It just how it is...

Ok...

Yeah, until now, yeah. I grew up with everyone in the area, we grew up together. My people there, that's the people that... that's all the role models I had we had each other, we didn't have fathers and all that stuff. We just had to learn by ourselves, innit?

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

Greg was one of the interviewees that I felt presented the strongest attachment to where he grew up. Moreover, and unlike most of the other young fathers, Greg talked positively of the people he grew up with. He projects a certain pride when he talks about his friends, who he refers to as brothers and role models, given the lack of fathers. However, Greg has already left the neighbourhood to attend university, and in a sense he is re-visiting his past from a better position than some of the other fathers. Moreover, his daughter lives in another neighbourhood that he deems suitable for her upbringing. While I am not denying that Greg does indeed feel strong about his friends and that his bonding to the area was, and still is very important, he has managed to get out of it and is currently living away while attending university.

The concept of bridging and bonding social capital can be applied to Greg's narrative: "bonding social capital tends to reinforce exclusive identities and maintain homogeneity; bridging social capital tends to bring together people across diverse social divisions" (Field, 2003:32). In this sense, it is argued that bonding social capital serves the purpose of 'getting by', whereas bridging social capital is useful in 'getting ahead'. These two forms of capital are useful when exploring issues of locality in young fathers' lives and their reasons for wanting to stay or leave their neighborhoods. In the case of Greg, it seems he mainly exhibits bridging social capital, in his desire to live away from the area in which he grew up. He equates this with bettering his life chances and those of his daughter. However, in his attachment to the neighbourhood he shows too a certain degree of bonding social capital. The key thing here is that Greg does not allow the bond he feels to the area where he grew up to stop him from forging a new life somewhere he feels more positive about.

Max, on the other hand, felt similar to Greg. However, he had not left the neighbourhood where he grew up and his children were living nearby.

Right... did you carry on being friends with... did it change your friendships at all?

Yeah... certain friends, certain friends I had to kind of cut away from because I can't be getting mixed up with certain things when I've got my

children... but most of my friends yeah, still yeah man.

Ok... erm. Of all the people who are around you, who have been around you, who would you say it's been the most helpful and the least...who's made it easier and more difficult for you to have a relationship with your children, or is it different people at different points?

Yeah people at different points... yeah, everyone's got their little in to help out, I definitely have to say my 3 brothers, not my biological brothers but Andy, Ricky and Ray... they... they're just... support... they're like, mentally support...

(Max, 23. 6 & 3 year old sons, non-resident)

It is relevant to point out the strength of friendships for some men, who likened them to family relations, referring to them as “*brothers*”. Good and positive friendships may bring with them further positive relationships. For example in the case of Max, he spoke of his 3 friends’ mothers as being like mothers to him, saying “*because they all look after me like mum and they talk to me like mum*”. This resembles the findings by Morrow (2001:45) who looked at the explanations and experiences of social exclusion by young people using Bourdieu’s concept of social capital. She found that

in terms of local identity, young people’s positive sources of identity derived from a sense of belonging in terms of relationships with the family and friends, rather than from a strong sense of place.

Such an idea, that positive sources of identity can be drawn from other people rather than locality could be applied to some of the young men in this research. It is these men who could in turn speak positively of their experiences of growing up where they did.

One of the important issues that Max brings up is how his impending fatherhood made him stop some friendships. This was also mentioned by Greg (above) as well as other men. This is an example of the positive influence that becoming a father can have, if the men take their role into their stride and make it an integral part of their lives. It shows too that friendships can bring the type of negative social capital, in the form of poor or destructive social capital (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005) mentioned above. For example, in the extract below Mason reflects on this time in prison and how that has affected his relationship with this child, as well as the strategy he is pursuing in order to re-instate his role as father. This essentially meant breaking ties with the friends he was seeing before going to jail and staying in the neighbourhood he had been relocated to.

You see basically it’s my son that’s keeping me going. Like as I said, I missed his birthday when I was in prison, and that’s one thing I pro-

mised myself I wouldn't do and now I have got that promise, you know what I mean? So I am trying to do the best I can to actually get him back and show him that I love him again, and also yeah, that's [unclear] It's hard for me at the moment, yeah, it's definitely hard.

How do you cope with it?

I just have to. It's just one of those things - I just have to cope with it and I know I can come out the better side, I can basically come out on the better side... There's been times when I could have got back into crime, and I mean that, coming out I could have got back into crime so easily, but I told my partner... so what I done is, I left all the friends that I used to be with and started afresh. So I am originally from Hackney. At the moment I am staying up in Edmonton.

In Edmonton?

Yeah.

Oh, that's much more...

Yeah, it's further up, yeah. So that is where I am looking to try and get my flat, up there, so it's a fresh area... you know, I can live my life and [unclear] there. That's what I am trying to do at the moment.

(Mason, 21. 4 year old son, non-resident)

Mason was mentioned in the introduction of this section as one of the young men who went to prison for reasons unknown to me, as he referred to it with an inconclusive “*when the crime actually happened*”. Because both him and his partner went to jail at the same time as Mason's parents took his son to avoid him going into foster care. One of the difficulties that Mason had at the time of the interview was that he was not actually allowed in the area where his son currently lived. Thus he had to arrange with his mother to meet elsewhere when he wanted to see him. In this sense, his stay out of the area is not voluntary but enforced. He has however, used the chance to re-establish himself away from the environment which he presents as conducive to getting into crime.

Personal agency against what can be consider an environment charged with negative social capital, becomes an essential part of the experience of being a father amongst some young men. Without a degree of agency, it appears, many of them would fail to fulfill their role. However, given the adverse circumstances that they face, it becomes understandable that sometimes they are not able to fulfill that role. The environment in which they live becomes one more aspect to take into consideration when researching young men from deprived backgrounds in the context of fatherhood. Indeed, MacDonald and Marsh (2005:884) found that young people's prolonged involvement in street based cultural identities “was crucial in entrapping some participants in criminality and depended drug use. Desistance depended upon separation from such networks”. For the young fathers in this study, including Mason above, this was an important aspect of their development as fathers.

8.3 Young men experiences of fathering beyond close doors

Some of the young fathers showed an awareness of the negative discourses and views on young fatherhood that are often socially held and which have been mentioned in this thesis. It can be argued that in the literature on young fatherhood, the perception of the father role has generally been discussed in relation to the realm of the private. However, there is one aspect to young fatherhood that, I would argue, often goes unacknowledged: their feelings when they father outside the home. In their social role as fathers, the young men in this research sometimes felt judged and scrutinized, while other times they felt praised. Fathers' perceptions of how those outside perceive them added a new dimension to how they viewed their role.

8.3.1 “*Society also assumes that young guys don’t make good parents*”: perceptions of social views on young fatherhood

In the introduction to her book, Dermott (2008) explains a situation at a seminar she attended in which two senior academics openly displayed their fatherhood status. One said he would use his son’s watch to keep his presentation on schedule, and the other one joked about his decreased productivity since becoming a father. As this was a seminar about nationalism and international migration, not fatherhood, it led Dermott (2008:1) to state that “the incidence serves as an example of the extent to which fatherhood is now pervasive as a comfortable public identity”.

When I read this statement it made me realise that this may be one of the biggest differences between older and younger fathers: the public perceptions of their roles and how comfortable they feel to father in society. My reflection was made in relation to some of the narratives that the young men told me around what it was like to be a father in public. It can be argued that there are two central, and opposed, aspects to these narratives: the condemnation and judgment they feel, and the approval the young men sometimes get. However, it can be argued that this approval comes from people’s feelings that the young fathers are doing something exceptional, unlike older fathers, and they are being praised for simply being there.

Finley was one of the fathers who spoke about how he thought society perceived young fathers.

Um, I just think like that the biggest challenges that young parents face is not just like... it’s the way society looks at us sometimes, like society also assumes that young guys don’t make good parents, and I feel... I wouldn’t even... I would say the hardest thing in this whole society is stereotypes.

(Finley, 24. 4 year old son, non-resident)

It was argued in the literature chapter that there are multiple negative discourses around teenage pregnancy and that public perception of the issue is shaped by those views (Holgate *et al*, 2006). Finley's quote can be taken as evidence of the importance of the discourses that circulate in society, and how these permeate people's attitudes and in turn affect young fathers' lives. What stands out from this quote is the way in which Finley finds societal views on young fatherhood the biggest challenge to overcome. This is coming from a man who has had his own personal struggles and whose experience of fatherhood has not been easy. For example, he experienced the temporary loss of contact with his child as a result of the break up. It can be argued that elevating society's views on young fatherhood, and the resulting negative stereotypes, as the most challenging aspect of fatherhood may be explained if it is looked at it from a structuration perspective. It is here where the two theoretical perspectives, discourse and structuration, can be brought together. Discourses can be taken as being part of the structure of society in so far as they shape the way people think and act upon a subject, in this case young fatherhood. For a young father to overcome the structural constraints and exercise his agency and power to change the *status quo* at the societal level may appear an impossible feat. On the contrary, his ability to, for example, negotiate contact with his ex-partner may seem easier in comparison. What the young men may not consciously realise is that by *being there* for their children they are actually contributing to changing that same structure that constrains their actions.

Nevertheless, the attitudes that society takes towards young fathers appear to influence their fathering role. It can be argued that the way young fathers perceive they are looked upon has two potential effects. Either it makes the young men stronger and more secure in their roles, or it brings on insecurities. For example, Greg spoke in the following way about how he felt about being in public with this daughter.

But most of the time it's negative "You are too young"...

Riiiiight, who is that?

Adults in general, public, even you can see it in people's eyes if they think that... me, I think about stuff a lot, I see someone looking at me in a certain way I think I know what they are saying... you know what I am trying to say? But I don't care, I just do the best for my daughter you know, I don't care about all that...

It doesn't affect you?

No, no... I am, I have to be stronger than that, for my daughter, I can't be thinking let them little things get to me, you know. They can judge me, but they don't know what I'm doing. If they found out I was in Uni doing my thing, whatever, they'd be shocked, if they'd know.

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

It can be argued that one of the issues with the negative stereotyping of young fathers is that it is based on what is expected of them. For example, the idea that they can be in higher

education may be in conflict with societal expectations of what young fathers do with their lives. Greg, like other fathers, felt the need to rise above the way in which he perceived people looked at him as a father. This can be related to the idea that young fathers can and do exercise their agency and power to overcome structural barriers, including people's attitudes towards them. But it is important to acknowledge that not all fathers have the strength to do so. For example Ryan, who was also at university, spoke of the insecurities that being outside with his daughter brought about in the following way:

Right, so you don't... pushing the pram makes you feel how, in the street?

It makes me feel like everyone is watching me and it makes me feel like I'm doing something wrong... but I know that I'm not doing something wrong, I push my daughter and it...

Right, so you don't feel...?

Yeah, I don't feel comfortable.

(Ryan, 22. 10 month old daughter, resident)

As opposed to Greg above, Ryan's feelings put him closer to the position of victim of structural forces. It appears that his perception on how he is viewed socially as a father interferes with his comfortableness in his role. However, it may be worth considering that he had been a father for less than one year while Greg's daughter was nearly three years old. What these two stories confirm, as explained in the literature review (page 22) is that young fathers cannot be seen as either completely responsible for their situation, nor as victims of the structural constraints. It shows that young fathers can feel differently and are not a homogeneous group, and that their situation may change over time. Indeed, there is no indication that Ryan will not grow more confident as times goes on and reach the point that Greg has done.

8.3.2 Social acknowledgement and positive reinforcement

fathers seem to be everywhere at the moment in the UK – in the press, in political pledges, in policies and in public places and spaces – as visible displays of doing fathering become more common place every day (Miller 2011:1).

To illustrate her argument that fathers are everywhere Miller (2011) explains an anecdotic situation she experienced. She tells how she was at the supermarket and saw a crowd of women, mainly older ones, gathered in a circle after the checkout. Curious about what they were looking at, she approached them and saw that there was a man bottle feeding his baby. This made her reflect on how this scene would have gone unnoticed if it was a mother. The same can be applied to young fathers whose visibility on a social level may be even

higher than that of older fathers. What is more, they possibly get more attention than teenage mothers, especially when it comes to getting praised for being active in their role. Indeed, the attention young fathers got was not always negative, and they were sometimes praised for their role. This inevitably made the young men feel good about their fatherhood status.

Tyler had a one year old daughter, and he explained his experience of fathering beyond the realm of the home in the following way:

And what about the attention you were saying that you got..?

Yeah a lot of people like stop by, I am a young dad, ant' I? Some people would look at it as if they frown up on it...

Did they? Did it make you feel a bit..? Do you get that actually? When you are on the street with Emily?

It depends really... some people wouldn't necessarily say but you can see it... but they would still try and smile at you and say "oh yeah" but you can see it... but on the whole people are... erm... very receptive to it..." oh it's good to see that you are looking after your child, it's good to see that..."

Oh so they actually say that?

Yeah, yeah, people say that...

(Tyler, 19. 1 year old daughter, non-resident)

There are two aspects that stand out from Tyler's narrative. First his explicitly stated awareness that the attention he got was related to this age. This can make can make young fathers either feel proud or insecure. Secondly, there are people's reactions to his fatherhood status which he perceived as being mixed. On the one hand there are those people who do not openly say it, but he feels are condemning the fact he is a young father. On the other, there are those people who congratulate him on taking an active fathering role and looking after his daughter. This is an example not only of the greater visibility of young fathers, but also of how their involvement may be seen as exceptional and therefore as worth commenting on. One argument may be that young fathers are actually being praised for their role because it is not what is expected of them. In society, their role is more visible and appreciated because it is measured against the negative stereotypes that have been mentioned earlier.

Encouraging comments can be positive for some young men. Akram, who was 19, considered those times as what felt good about being a father. Jayden spoke of his pride when people commented on how cute his baby was.

And can you think of a time when it sort of felt, like very good to be a dad? Can you think of a time when you thought "Oh it's really nice!"

Yeah, when I take him out. "Oh you've got a cute son, yeah yeah" you feel a dad, you feel good...

(Akram, 19. 4 year old son, non-resident)

You are in the queue and they go “Oh, he is so cute, oh how old is he, how old is he?” Well OK, there you go!

How does it feel when people like get..?

It makes me proud, it makes me proud. They could tell, because I didn't have to say to them I am proud, they said “Oh, you can tell you are a proud dad, you are very proud” and “I am indeed, yeah.” Of course I am proud - I love every second of it.

(Jayden, 20. 3 month old son, non-resident)

It can be argued that in the same way that negative attitudes can be seen as discouraging the father role, positive ones can have the opposite effect. They make young fathers feel good about their role, proud to be a father and possibly more comfortable in their public identity.

8.3.3 Professional views

Young fathers often perceived professionals as having a negative view of them. They did not always feel involved by professionals, such as doctors or midwives, when they saw them during the pregnancy stage and once the child had been born. In these cases, the young fathers spoke of feeling discriminated on the basis of their age and/or gender. In relation to professional practice, there is evidence that young fathers receive little support and preparation in the transition to parenthood and are often not encouraged to play a role in their children's lives (Quinton *et al*, 2002; Tyrer *et al*, 2005; Speak *et al*, 1997). Despite this, a minority of fathers spoke of positive contact with professionals. Positive contact was both in relation to one-to-one support, as well as in the couple context.

8.3.3.1 Professional treatment: negative experiences

Most of the young fathers spoke of not feeling involved by the professionals they came in contact with. This lack of involvement was particularly felt by the young fathers when they had visits in which the baby's mother was present. Dan and Max were two of the participants who specifically spoke of the issue in this way.

Dan, a 19 year old father of two, did not feel that the doctors treated him differently for being a young father or couple.

What about the doctors, what are they like with you as a young dad or as a young couple?

I think they are pretty normal, I don't think they are different to...

(Dan, 19. 2 year old son & 11 month old daughter, resident)

However, when I asked Dan if he felt involved his response was the following:

Dads don't really feel that involved anyways... it's more like, it's like "mum mum mum, baby" anyway, everything is like mum first...

(Dan, 19. 2 year old son & 11 month old daughter, resident)

Max spoke similarly in relation to how he felt he was treated by the professionals he came in contact with:

They are genuine people that they are there to do their jobs... but they are more there to do their jobs for the woman's concern...

(Max, 23. 6 year & 3 year old sons, non-resident)

It appears that the fathers who felt they were not being involved by professionals because they were male are the ones that seemed to be less affected by such exclusion. It can be argued that this may mean that the young men were seeing their exclusion as caused by being a *father*, rather than a *young father*. These young fathers were therefore aligning professional practices with discourses on fatherhood generally. Consequently, it seems the young fathers were seeing certain normality in the treatment they got from professionals. It is argued by Daniel and Taylor (2001) that when it comes to professional practice the father is marginalized, and one of the reasons for this marginalisation is precisely gender role distinctions and the expectations they create. As they explain,

There appears to be a self-reinforcing cycle in which mothers expect to be the focus of attention, fathers expect not to be involved, and child care practitioners expect to engage with mothers (Daniel and Taylor, 2001:22).

However, unlike Dan and Max, there were men that felt they were being judged or excluded because of their age as well as their gender. It can be argued that there are two potential responses to such a scenario from the young fathers: they could either challenge the professional or they could remain silent. Greg and Abiola were part of what can be considered confident fathers who, when felt excluded, decided to confront the situation.

I've had a couple of experiences where a doctor is not even looking at me and they talk straight to my partner, they are not even looking at me. You know if I'm sitting there, they are just looking at my partner and talk to her...

About the baby?

About the baby and stuff, about...

And have you said anything?

Yeah, one time I said "I'm here as well you know".

Ok! Did you?

Of course!
And what did he or she say?
Said “I’m sorry yeah” so rubbish innit?
Riiight...

So yeah, it’s happened, it’s one of them things... they, I think that young people, don’t know, I can’t say in general, but, from my experiences, like, sometimes you can look down upon them, judge, people judge you.

(Greg, 20. 3 year old daughter, non-resident)

The view that Greg is expressing is one of feeling judged. In his case his narrative points towards feeling marginalized for being male, as he felt only his partner was being addressed by the doctor. As a couple, he felt that sometimes they were judged for being young parents. However, Greg was confident to challenge what he perceived was unfair treatment by the professionals. This demonstrates a great deal of agency on his side and an ability to exercise power and control over the situation. It can be argued that acts like Greg’s contribute to changing the structure that feed and maintain central professional practices that are not inclusive of fathers.

Sometimes, like in the case of Abiola, the judgment based on age was openly expressed by the professional.

I kind of felt a little bit awkward because I am so young kind of thing, and I could actually kind of see that... like they are kind of probably thinking the same thing like you are kind of young. I think one of them even said that, “you two are kind of young”, I am like...

They have said that?

Yeah, one of them...I was like “Yeah, we are happy together so it doesn’t really matter - I am going to look after him” and things like that.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old son, non-resident)

Whether because of gender or age, the experiences of many of the young fathers in this research resonate with previous research findings on professional practice (Pollock *et al*, 2005; Featherstone, 2001). Indeed, as Sherriff (2007:6) argues “even services that do engage with young men place little value on their roles as fathers, and rarely asks questions about parental status as a matter of course”. It may be difficult for young men to challenge such practices and make themselves feel included.

One potential consequence of this lack of inclusion is that they may start withdrawing during visits. This is in some ways what happened with Ali. He explained how the midwife came into the house and asked his baby’s mother questions about him, while he was present. Ali’s feelings about this situation are the following:

Yeah, and it's just like... I know she's not having a go at me, but she was like... is he treating the baby right, is he looking after the baby... 'Do you let him hold the baby?' 'Do you let him do this?' and I am thinking... it's kind of like I am a brother - I am the father of the baby like.

(Ali, 17. 3 month old daughter, non-resident)

Later on in the conversation Ali explained that after experiences such as this “*I just stay in another room. It's just like let them two have their own little session and when the midwife is gone I can come out and I'll speak to Emma*”. Such behaviour on Ali's side may have the effect that was mentioned before: the professional may understand his withdrawal as disinterestedness. This in turn may mean that the professional further marginalizes Ali, with the result of making him feel less important and involved. Moreover, Ali may feel that he is being assessed by both the baby's mother, who has to report back to the midwife, and the midwife who asks questions about his behavior. Thus, the midwife's attitude may contribute to his lack of confidence around performing certain caring tasks. Moreover, his insecurities may be reinforced by not being treated as the father. Of great significance may be the negative impact that a midwife can potentially have on young fathers' confidence and their image of themselves as fathers.

8.3.3.2 Professional treatment: positive experiences

A number of fathers spoke of having positive experiences with professionals. These sometimes were cases in which the fathers had one to one contact with a professional that was there exclusively to support him. For example Abiola had a social worker who he found helpful.

Right, and are you happy with her?

Yeah, I am happy with her, I am happy. It's someone to talk to as well.

Yeah, like you talk about...

I talk about sort of my experiences, what's happened so far and things, and how I am finding it - like difficulties and things like that.

(Abiola, 19. 2 month old son, non-resident)

Having someone to talk to about their issues appears to be one of the things that young fathers valued from professional support. It seemed that they valued this over practical help and advice, which most fathers felt they could get elsewhere, such as their mothers, friends or books. It can be argued that when professionals pay attention to young fathers, they contribute to making young fathers feel included as well as important to their children. For example, when we talked about the help he received, Saleem said

It was helpful like to be... to feel that they are not just concerned about my son, and obviously I wanted to be... what... they were also concerned about me as well, you know, a young parent, yeah.

(Saleem, 2. 4 year old son, non-resident)

An important aspect of making young fathers feel included and encourage their involvement, is that positive impact that young fathers' support can have on the mother. As argued by Gale (2008:109) "the support of the impending father by health professionals is also important in assisting the new mother in her transition to motherhood". Moreover, I would add that when health professionals include the young men in front of the partner, this may positively affect the way in which the mothers view the father role. Saleem was one of the only fathers who spoke positively about the treatment he got from professionals during visits with this partner

Right, and when you went to the scans, how was it with the people there?

They were very nice and friendly - not just... like the doctors and the midwives just showing me like 'Oh, that's your child there. This is what's happening, his heart rate and you have reached this month and you are seeing your son going to be born' - that's what they said.

Did you feel included by..?

Yeah, they did a lot to include me.

(Saleem, 2. 4 year old son, non-resident)

The role of the professional in involving the young fathers may therefore be deemed important for a number of reasons. It can be argued that it can contribute to make the fathers feel important, needed and excited. At the same time, professionals may have the opportunity to help young fathers build an identity as a father during the pregnancy. In turn building a positive father identity may encourage them to be involved as well as to commit to fatherhood. The opposite effect may occur if young fathers are not included by professionals. They may feel unimportant and detached, which in turn may contribute to lesser involvement and eventual disengagement.

8.4 Conclusion

As it has been shown throughout this chapter, most young fathers talked negatively about the place where they grew up or the place where they were currently living. As a result, the young fathers in this research were also critical of the area in which they wanted their children to grow up in. This critical engagement was often a future projection: what the children could become if they grew up in a certain environment with certain influences and problems. One of the strategies that the young fathers spoke about in terms of keeping their children safe from environmental risks and the negative influence of others was to bring up children in neighbourhoods that they deemed suitable or beneficial for their well-being and future life chances.

It can be argued that their assessment of their neighbourhood and their lives there is also mediated by the fact that they have become fathers. Indeed their desire to provide a more positive environment may influence the way they re-visit their past and evaluate lives in those neighbourhoods. There were stories about overcoming peer pressures and area effects and breaking ties in order to have a better future. Becoming a young father offers these young men the chance to reflect on their own lives and strive for a 'better life' for their children. The stories around neighbourhoods and children show an active engagement on the fathers' side and a desire to provide a better future for their children, despite often living in difficult circumstances.

The impact of not having had a father around became apparent as the interview unfolded, and it affected different aspects of young men's experiences of fatherhood. Father absence made the young men more determined to be there for their children. However, it was argued that the lack of fathers meant that sometimes young fathers did not have solid fathering examples by which to measure their role. This may have created unrealistic expectations as to what the role of a father ought to be. Another consequence was in making young men fathers feel insecure about their role.

Friendships were discussed by the young men in two ways. There were those negative networks that the young men felt offered them poor social capital and connections. Then there were strong friendships, which were sometimes likened to family relations, which the young fathers put great value on.

The young men spoke of the experiences of fathering in society, which is something that appeared important in shaping their identity as fathers. There were those men who felt judged by society, based on the way they were looked at or spoken to. It was argued that societal expectations about young fathers was generally low. This however may have one unintended consequence: sometimes the young fathers were praised for their involvement when they fathered outside the home. The young fathers also spoke to me about the way in which they felt they were treated by health and social work professionals. It can be argued that despite there being some examples of good practice, many of the young fathers spoke of negative experiences. From being judged by their age and gender, to not feeling involved, the men in this research highlighted the need for health professionals to encourage and promote the participation of young fathers.

Chapter 9: Discussion

Research that takes a dynamic approach, exploring the varied pathways through which young men enter and attempt to sustain parenthood is particularly sparse (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2014:69).

When this research started in 2006, the view that young fatherhood was an under researched area was common. Eight years later, in 2014, the same view prevailed. It is the aim of this thesis to contribute to the limited, yet growing, research on this very relevant topic that is young fatherhood. Its particular contribution lies in revealing that young fathers, whether resident or not, can play a major and significant role on their children's lives. The findings in this study are significant in that they challenge the often held idea that a non-resident father is an absent or uninvolved one. This research also demonstrates the importance that young fathers attach to the relationship with their children and how fatherhood can be a turning point for young men of socially excluded and ethnic minority backgrounds. The thesis argues that young fathers are above all just fathers and that the label "young" can at times create barriers and constraints for men who become fathers at an earlier age than average.

The focus of the study is young fathers, young defined as someone who had a child under the age of 25, in accord with the selection criteria explained in chapter 4. The participants' social environment as well as their demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and ethnicity, have been used to contextualise their experiences of fatherhood.

A number of key themes emanated from the interviews and these included: young men's determination to be there for their children, the importance of the romantic relationships in shaping young fathers' roles, young men's active involvement in fathering, and the relevance of young men's backgrounds. This last chapter offers a discussion of these key themes, followed by a section on the general findings, the limitations of the study. as well as recommendations for future research, for professional practice and for social policy .The chapter ends with some concluding thoughts on the thesis.

9.1 Unplanned but not unwanted: the transition to fatherhood

In chapter 5, young men's reactions to the news of the pregnancy were explored. The interviews suggested that all but one of the pregnancies had not been jointly planned by the young men and their partners. In this sense shock was a common reaction when the girlfriends shared the news with them, and mixed feelings, ranging from fear to excitement, developed as the pregnancy news settled.

The research findings suggest that coming to terms with the pregnancy is a process, and for most men part of this process involved considering an abortion. Thinking about abortion brought about issues around morality and the taking of responsibility for one's actions and decisions. In general terms, abortion has been overlooked in teenage pregnancy research and policy (Hoggart, 2012; Tabberer *et al*, 2000), possibly because it is a sensitive subject, as it is entwined with cultural, religious, moral and ethical views (French *et al*, 2005; Waller, 2002). The narratives created by the young men suggested that this is an important part of their experiences of the initial phase of the pregnancy. Justifying their initial desire for an abortion was done on the basis that they did not feel ready to become fathers. The feeling of unpreparedness was a common one for the men in this research as they felt too young to face the responsibilities that fatherhood brings. This echoes the conceptualisation of young fatherhood as a fast track to adulthood, which views young men as unprepared to assume or tackle the responsibilities that fatherhood brings (Fagan *et al*, 2007).

Despite this initial consideration, the idea of an abortion was discarded as a viable option. On an individual basis the young men felt that it was something 'wrong'. Mixed with this moral stand there were emotional feelings (i.e. *what if this is my one chance to have a baby?*), or the idea that it was fate. Added to this there was the thought that they should take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. In this sense, it appears men made use of two discourses in order to reject abortion and to explain why they preferred taking the pregnancy to term: first, discursive viewpoints about the morally undesirability of abortion and secondly, discourses related to masculinity and fatherhood (Dermott, 2008). Indeed, Westwood (1995:26) describes fatherhood as "one of the major signifiers of masculinity". When it comes to early pregnancy and abortion it may be argued that the issue of masculinity is not related to the conception itself but rather to the side of fatherhood that entails taking responsibility. This is in accord with previous research by Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) who found that young men did not see the conception as signifying their passage from boyhood to manhood. Indeed, as they explain "biological paternity was not seen as an emblem for masculinity... the bigger challenge is to assume responsibility for their children and families" (Marsiglio and Hutchinson, 2002:205). Consequently, the young men's rejection of abortion may be based on certain masculinity ideals and social discourses that equate the taking of responsibility for one's children with a heightened sense of manhood.

One important aspect of wanting to take the pregnancy to term was that for the majority of men in this research, unplanned was not a synonym of unwanted. Indeed, research findings suggest that once the news had sunk in the young men expressed positive feelings at the idea of becoming fathers. It was clear to them that they wanted to be there for their children and contribute to their upbringing and well-being. Thus, the majority of young fathers in this research wanted to be involved, and in accord with previous research, fatherhood was

a turning point in many of these young men's lives (Marsiglio and Hutchinson, 2002). For a number of men in this study, fatherhood was perceived as a transformative or redemptive experience. For example Ashton mentioned that a big motivation for him to stop being involved in gangs was becoming a father. Even though this young man was the only one who had no relationship with his child, he was reportedly still keeping out of trouble. However, what was interesting was that some of the participants, despite growing up in deprived neighbourhoods and having been in trouble, had made their transition out of those environments and lifestyles. For example Greg and Ryan were at university. It can be argued that for these men the influence of fatherhood was not so much a turning point but an added reason to keep on the straight and narrow.

The positive impact of fatherhood may be related to reflexivity, a concept from structuration theory that can help explain why for some young men becoming a father is a positive life event. What is important about reflexivity, as was explained, is that it gives individuals the opportunity to learn from their experiences and of changing their circumstances, albeit with limits (O'Donnell, 2003). Part of the changing of circumstances was related to what Giddens called ontological security (Giddens, 1984). Ontological security refers to people's sense of predictability about how things are in the social world, which are enacted in routines. These routines in turn contribute to the building of one's self identity. According to structuration theory, when people's ontological security is disrupted they make use of their discursive consciousness to come to terms with and understand a new situation. Such a concept can be applied to how young men deal with the issues of an unexpected pregnancy. When unplanned fatherhood happens, young men make use of their discursive consciousness to make sense of the new situation. It is here where the potential for young fatherhood to become a positive, life-changing event for some young men may be.

The narratives of the young men, as discussed in chapter 4, suggest that another reason to take the pregnancy to term was the family's (mainly the mothers) positive reactions towards the pregnancy news. As reported, generally, the news were greeted with shock followed by acceptance, with little or no conflict between the young fathers and their families or mothers.

9.2 Young men being fathers and being fathered

The literature on contemporary fatherhood points out that conceptualisations and research on fatherhood continue to be based around the notions of the breadwinner (Lewis and Warin, 2001) and the role of the carer (Matta and Knudson-Martin, 2006; Smith *et al*, 2007). The research findings from this thesis suggest that these two aspects of fatherhood, providing and caring, are part of young fathers perceptions of what their roles are and should be.

Young fathers face a number of difficulties in fully adopting the role of the economic provider, as has been documented in the literature (Sigle-Rushton, 2005; Speak *et al*, 1997) and the issue of young fathers and economic provision is a politicised one. One of the reasons why young fatherhood is vilified is due to this reported inability to support their children. In fact, as explained in chapter one, one of the only acknowledgements that young fathers received in the 1999 Teenage Pregnancy report is that they should be made responsible to support their offspring (SEU,1999). It can be argued that this view is heavily influenced by the conceptualisation of the role of the father as main economic provider, what is often called the breadwinner family model (Lewis, 2001). The appropriateness of applying this model to the experience of fatherhood amongst young men can be questioned. Indeed, it is known that young men's potential to fulfill that role is curtailed by their age and socio-economic background, as most young fathers are not yet ready to take up that role. In fact, it may be argued that economic provision is one of the areas in which the experience of fatherhood between young and older fathers differs. Thus a straight comparison between these two groups will put most young fathers at a disadvantage. By using the breadwinner family model young fathers are being compared to older ones, which is not appropriate as we are not comparing like with like.

In relation to black fathers, Franklin (2010) argues that being unemployed is a major risk for this particular population, as it may hinder their self-worth as fathers. As was explained in the literature chapter, Black older fathers are more likely to be unemployed and this contributes to their greater chance of being non resident (Crevalle, 2011; Franklin, 2010). It can be argued that for young fathers of African and Caribbean descent a number of factors intersect and interfere in their experience of fatherhood. Indeed, in addition their young age and likelihood of coming from a lower socio-economic group there is the influence of their ethnic background. For young men of minority backgrounds, their ethnicity could be considered a particular factor that contributes to their difficulty providing for their children.

Added to the issue of economic provision, there were a number of areas in which the perspective of young fathers could be considered different from that of older fathers. For example, this study found that young fathers felt unprepared for fatherhood. While older fathers may too report similar feelings, the difference lies in that young men in this research based such feeling on their age. Indeed, considering themselves too young was related to feeling unprepared for the many responsibilities that fatherhood brought. These responsibilities included not only providing for the children, but also investing their time to bringing them up, as well as leaving certain friendships and environments. This meant, that for some of the young men fatherhood brought conflicting feelings of wanting to be there, but also to carry on with their life and the plans they had. These findings can be related to the issue of transitions discussed in chapter 2, in which young fatherhood is seen as two transitions superimposing:

the psychosocial transition to parenthood with the regular teenager to adult transition (Ross *et al*, 2010). Thus, while both for older and younger men becoming a fathers is equivalent to taking responsibility, it appears that for young fathers who have not planned the birth of their children, the taking of responsibility is a decision that has to be made.

While the young men in this research gave accounts of their difficulties providing for their children, their narratives showed that they contributed to their lives in non-material ways. The research findings suggest that the diversification of the fathering role has worked to the advantage of young fathers. Indeed, it appears that certain discourses, such as those of “new fatherhood” (Henwood *et al*, 2003) allowed the young men to take up an alternative fathering role to that of breadwinner. This moved them away from popular negative views on young fathers, who are often represented as being absent and feckless (Duncan, 2007). In this sense, the experience of fatherhood amongst this group of men, particularly the one-to-one father-child relationship, could be considered to be similar to that of older fathers. So for example, the interviews showed that young fathers were the same as older fathers, in terms of their motivations, worries and hopes for their children. As seen in chapter 8, the young fathers in this research spoke of wanting their children to do well at school, and achieve more than they had done. Their values around the importance of children’s education were often stated, and it was one of the fundamental aspects of their role as fathers. They also spoke of their concerns around their children growing up in certain environments, the role models available to their children and their future well-being.

In accord with previous research (Wilkes *et al*, 2011), the findings of this thesis suggest that their impending fatherhood made the young men reflect on the type of parenting, and particularly fathering, that they had received. One to the main issues for most of the young fathers was growing up without a father, or with a an uninvolved one. Such reflections gave young men the impetus to be involved and to be active right from the start. In this study the narratives that the young men created around growing up without an involved father gave a sense of having made them feel more vulnerable towards negative influences in their lives. Such accounts resonate with certain aspects of social capital theory, and particularly the work of Coleman (1990). As seen in chapter 3, family is central to social capital theories with families seen as either generating or destroying social capital (Edwards *et al*, 2003). In particular, it was discussed in chapter 3 how Bourdieu (1984) and Coleman (1990) conceptualized social capital generation in the family as a benefit to the children, albeit differently. Bourdieu saw the family as a site for the reproduction of privilege, hence seeing social capital as just benefiting the bourgeoisie. Coleman (1990) was interested in how social capital within the family impacted on the education outcomes of children and did not limit the benefits of social capital to the wealthy and privileged. However, Coleman believed that the benefits of social capital could only be felt in relation to the time invested by the adults

in the household in the children's education. He favoured the two parent nuclear family as the ideal site to transmit social capital as he saw the missing of one adult as a "structural deficiency" (1988:S111). Consequently, his theory does not favour the lone mother family form, and this is one of the reasons for which his work is criticised (Edwards *et al*, 2003)

Generally, the young men in this study wanted to do things differently from their own fathers on a number of levels. First, they wanted to be involved in their lives and see their children regularly (although how often they saw them was a very personal issue, and it varied from daily to once a month). They wanted to educate their children and protect them from potential negative influences. The young fathers wanted to be close to their children and were emotionally connected and available for them. For example, when they lived apart from them they spoke of making regular phone calls to keep in touch. The study suggests that having an absent or uninvolved father made young fathers more determined to be there for their children. The young fathers, possibly in an attempt to compensate their accounts of the detrimental effects of growing up without a father, simultaneously built accounts presenting their lack of father as having made them stronger. In general terms, these research findings echo previous research that has shown young fathers' desire to be better fathers than their absent fathers had been (Reeves, 2006; Cater and Coleman, 2006; Speak *et al*, 1997). What this research found is not having had a constant father figure made some of the young men feel insecure in their role as fathers. This brought about two opposing feelings: wanting to be there and be good father and fear that they may not succeed. However, it was argued that the influence of not having had a father around was not on the quality of their parenting. Instead, what the study suggests is that lack of a father figure meant that young fathers did not have parameters by which to measure what good fatherhood is. In turn, this meant that some may have set very high expectations of themselves, and may therefore feel unnecessarily incompetent when not reaching them. In turn, this could be detrimental and make the young men distance themselves from their children if they feel they are not doing a good enough job.

9.3 Young father involvement

After doing an initial review of the literature on teenage pregnancy and young fatherhood, it was clear to me that I wanted to put more emphasis on the daily aspects of being an involved young father. This meant investigating the practical and emotional side of the father-child relationship and the day-to-day interaction. Much of what had been written focused on issues of exclusion and difficulties experienced by young fathers. But there was limited knowledge on how young fathers acted as parents and what their worries and their parenting styles were. This does not mean that this research is biased by just focusing on the positives of fathering. The interviewees themselves spoke of some of the hurdles they encountered as young fathers. These have been included in the analysis, for example in exploring some of the tensions in the father-mother cohabiting experiences.

It was explained in the methodology chapter that this is a study about involved young fathers. Involvement took different meanings, according to their specific life situation as well as the fatherhood trajectory of each of the young men. For example, involvement changed over time, as the children grew up or the living arrangements evolved. Findings from this study suggest that these life changes meant that roles and routines had to be adapted accordingly. Generally, in this research, involvement was understood as fathers who have a relationship with their children, albeit with different degrees of contact. Father involvement can be seen as evolving and changing not static. For the group of young men that took part in the research, being involved meant being present in their children's lives and seeing them on a regular basis. How often they saw them varied according to different factors such as geographical location, young fathers' availability (for instance if they were studying or working) or the relationship with the mother. But what stands out is that all fathers but one were able to maintain a relationship with their children, despite certain challenges they encountered. Involvement was related not only to quantity of contact, but to the quality of the relationships.

The study has found that overall the young fathers aimed to contribute to their children's well being. There were many examples of this, from helping them with developing their motor skills during the baby phase to playing, reading to them or doing homework. What is relevant to point out is that the five aspects that Gavin *et al* (2002:267) considered were part of father involvement in all cultures (endowment, protection, provision, formation and caregiving) were fulfilled by all the young fathers who had a relationship with their child(ren). For example, in relation to protection, the young fathers spoke at length about their worries around their children growing up in certain neighbourhoods and environments. When it comes to formation, the tasks for discipline and teaching were part of the role the young fathers adopted. The one aspect that was harder to fulfill was provision, however, it can be argued that despite not being able to provide economically, the young fathers did worry and made sure that their children's material needs were met even if they could not do so directly. Examples of this included taking care of benefit allowances, asking their family for economic help or taking jobs sporadically.

This thesis showed that one particularly positive aspect of being an involved father was the bond and emotional relationship with the child. It appeared that fulfilling the father role gave the young men an opportunity to be nurturing and caring, something they may not get the chance to experience given the environments in which they grew up, as explored in chapter 8. Moreover, I would argue that this emotional attachment gave the young men the opportunity to build a masculine identity that moves away from their previous identity which was based by some around street -based culture or criminal activities. As explained by Dermott (2008) and discussed in chapter six, 'new fatherhood' may offer young men a legitimate way to show emotions because it is linked to procreation and in turn to heterosexuality. As opposed

to 'new man' discourses which were popularised in the 1990s and that bore more femininised connotations, fatherhood is imbued with masculinity traits. For this reason, young men can adopt caring roles with their children while maintaining their sense of manhood. Fatherhood therefore offers an opportunity to reflect on one's life, gain perspective, and I would argue, even re-invent oneself, as explored earlier .

In light of examples of positive and involved parenting, it has been shown that there are many ways in which young fathers can contribute to their children's lives and well-being. However there continues to be a focus on economic provision, or lack of (Duncan *et al*, 2010). Indeed, at a political and societal level concerns exist around the cost that teenage parents bring to the government, with benefits sometimes being seen as an encouragement for young girls to get pregnant (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). In fact, when the benefit cap by the previous coalition government was being discussed, a number of Tory MPs directly targeted the benefits young mothers were entitled to. They claimed that "a more radical approach was needed to get pregnancy rates down" and that "the current system has led some young people to think, incorrectly, that they had an automatic right to free housing if they got pregnant, encouraging them to have a child" (Brant, 2013, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-23309095). Thus it is in this climate that the role of the young fathers is lived and needs to be understood. Moreover, such discourses influence the economic demands that are made on young fathers, which they are often not able to fulfill. The focus on economic provision, as Duncan *et al* (2010) argue, signals towards the view that the only route toward social inclusion is through paid employment (i.e. providing for one's child), while parenthood is neglected as contributing to that process. It can be argued that such an approach puts the main worth of the young father in his ability to provide, and negates any other contributions that young men can and do make to their children's lives. Moreover, it can be speculated that if young fathers are able to build a positive relationship with their children, based on the new father roles, the influence of economic provision may be less important. In the case of this research fatherhood sometimes gave young fathers the impetus to turn their lives around, and other times to keep on the right track, as has been argued in the thesis.

9.4 Co-parenting experiences

Many of the young fathers talked at length about their partners or ex-partners, pointing towards the centrality of the relationship with the mother in their experiences of fatherhood. Indeed, this relationship appeared to be an influencing factor in the nature of the father-child bond, affecting both the quality and quantity of contact, in accord with previous research (Easterbrooks *et al*, 2007; Kalil *et al*, 2005). In this study, a small minority of couples continued to be together in seemingly stable relationships, while the majority were troubled or had finished either prior to the birth or after. Some of these relationships that had finished were after a period of cohabitation. It can be argued that the knowledge about young co-

parenting is limited and this research contributes to this area in significant ways.

One important finding of this research is that it shows that residency does not determine father involvement. In this way, it challenges the notions of the absent father and helps disassociate the idea of involvement and residency as being tied together. It demonstrates that young fathers can live away from their children and not be romantically linked to the mother of their child(ren) yet continue to play an active role in their upbringing. This may resemble living and family arrangements in Black communities, in which, as argued in chapter 2, visitation fatherhood has been tolerated for a long time (Fatherhood Institute, 2010)

The research evidence from this study suggest that attachment to the child was not dependent upon a close, romantic relationship with the mother, as it has been suggested by other research (Arai, 2009). Indeed, there were many cases in which the young men were no longer in a relationship with the mother, yet they continued to see their children on a regular basis and were active parents. There were some relationships that were in what could be termed a “grey area”. By this I mean that while the couples were not together, they were not completely separated either. For example, some of the young fathers may have stayed overnight with their baby’s mother or spoke about a possibility of rekindling the relationship in the future. However, men in these type of relationships indicated that the relationship with the child was partly independent from the romantic and sexual attachment to the mother. However, one view that was held is that in order “to have a good relationship with the child you have to get on with the mother”, in the words of Finley. But again, “getting on” was not tied up to having a romantic or a sexual relationship. What is significant about this finding is that, given the right circumstances, young fathers can actively parent and be present in their children’s lives despite not being with the mother. However, it can be argued that the young mothers had the ultimate power over the father-child relationship, and the young men’s agency was sometimes curtailed. For example, a minority of men spoke of temporarily losing contact with their children because the relationship with the mother collapsed and she put barriers between the father and the child.

Another important finding is that none of the young fathers spoke of feeling fearful that having the child would tie them to the mother. Maybe this is in tune with the nature of contemporary romantic relationships and family building patterns which are more individualised and less tied to social norms (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Moreover, as was mentioned in chapter 7, there seems to be a change in what is expected of young men when their girlfriends became pregnant. Indeed, none of the young fathers mentioned that they felt they should get married to them, while “in the past young parents would have been cajoled or coerced into ‘shotgun weddings’ ” (Lemos, 2009:25). This is an important cultural shift in that young men engaging in sexual activity do not have the social parameters that dictate

what to do if a pregnancy occurs. In this sense, the young men have many options open to them, which in some ways may add to the stress and pressure. Some of the young men in this research decided to go down the cohabitation route, and attempted to create a young family and be a breadwinner. Most of these attempts were not successful in the long term and the couples broke up. Other young fathers decided not to fully commit to the relationship and did not cohabit with their baby's mother, but thought they may do so in the future. However, what transpired from the interviews is that many of these decisions were individualised and there were no wider socio-cultural norms that the young men adhered to when talking about making a commitment (or not).

The narratives offered in the course of the interviews showed that when cohabiting relationships ran into trouble, the young fathers struggled with the idea of moving out. An essential motivational factor to continue living together was the fear that breaking up would alter the father-child relationship. Sadness at the thought of not seeing the child every day, and missing them growing up on a daily basis were some of the reasons why they felt it was worth staying together despite experiencing difficulties. However, the worry that arguments and tension with the mother may negatively affect their children was given as a good enough reason to move out. Fathers who had already moved out at the time of the interview used such arguments as reasons to justify breaking up. In this sense, what seems important is that the young men did not appear to simply walk away from the mother and child, but were engaged in a process of weighing up the pros and cons. And central to this process was the well-being of the child, and the desire to continue playing a role in their lives. It is interesting to consider how young fathers' decisions on moving out may be influenced by discourses on what being a good father is, i.e. someone who is physically available and there for their children on a day to day basis. The potential influence that circulating discourses can have on people lives was discussed in chapter 3. However, this feeling may be based on their personal experience and reflection about how they were fathered: often without fathers or with fathers who, even if present, did not seem available or emotionally involved.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of 'young families' is barely spoken about often referring to young fathers and mothers as separate entities. I would argue that there are at least two reasons for which young fathers are not seen as part of forming a family. First, there is their reported inability to fully financially support their children (Speak *et al*, 1997; Jones, 2002) which maintains the legitimization of fatherhood through paid employment. Secondly, this view may be influenced by the way in which young relationships do not often followed pre-established and conventional relationships patterns and living arrangements. However, as Florsheim *et al* (1999:180) argues,

more research on nontraditional co-parenting arrangements is needed to examine the link between co-parenting relationships and paternal functioning among non-traditional, high risk families.

All the young fathers in this research that had suffered a negative phase managed to re-address the relationship with the mother, and re-gain access to the child or normalize the relationship with them (with the exception of Ashton). Some of the participants were in fragile relationships at risk of breaking up at the actual time of the interview, while others spoke of past problems. In order to avoid the issue of absent fatherhood, it is important to investigate the mechanisms by which young couples manage to re-address their differences after separation. However, it is equally important to support family types that differ from the normative nuclear family with two resident parents and acknowledge that non-resident fathers can be involved fathers and contribute positively to their children's upbringing.

9.5 Young fathers' background

The young men's accounts of their life trajectories and influences were often framed in relation to their family background, their own childhood and the communities where they grew up. This in turn is linked to their ethnic background, which influenced their family form and, it may be argued, the cultural context in which they lived.

As was discussed in the literature review, teenage and young parenthood is more common in certain ethnic groups than in others. First, Census data on mothers under 19 show that the ethnic groups with higher incidence of births are 'Mixed White and Black Caribbean', 'Other Black' and 'Black Caribbean' (DFES, 2006a). The influence of ethnicity has been described as "complex" (Winters & Winters, 2012:12). This complexity is related to the many variables at play in explaining higher teenage pregnancy rates amongst some ethnic minorities. These variables range from cultural and parental restrictions on the start of sexual relationships, to contraceptive use, or ideas around intimacy and relationships (Lemos, 2009). Despite the lack of official data, early entry into fatherhood specifically is too more common amongst black African and Caribbean (including those of mixed heritage) backgrounds than amongst the white population (Higginbottom *et al*, 2006). The experience of young fathers may be different amongst young men from ethnic minority backgrounds as culturally, it may be something considered normal and therefore not condemned. For example, as explored in chapter five, when the young fathers broke the pregnancy news to their mothers, there generally was no conflict involved. The families often reacted with shock but swiftly moved on to acceptance. The findings also suggest that the fact that many of the paternal grandmothers had been young mothers themselves meant greater acceptance and understanding of the situation.

Another aspect to bear in mind is family arrangements and ethnic background. The literature shows that non-residential fatherhood is more common in Black African and Caribbean families, as well as those of mixed heritage (Platt, 2009). This is often mistaken with absent

fatherhood (Reynolds, 2009) when in fact it is argued that ‘visitation fatherhood’ has been practiced and tolerated in Black communities for a long time (Fatherhood Institute, 2010). Research findings from this thesis suggest that the way in which young men lived their relationships and their role as fathers was partly influenced by these cultural aspects. As explored in chapter 7, the romantic relationships and living arrangements amongst the young parents varied. A minority were cohabiting, others had lived together as a family unit but had broken up, while others were in what I termed a ‘grey area’, which meant that a decision had not been taken as to what the future held for the couple relationship. However, what united all the young men, but one, was the desire to play an active role despite not cohabiting with their partners and children. This research also suggests that the living and relationships arrangements were fluid and that there was little influence of wider social norms on the couple. For example, some of the young couples that were in a ‘grey area’, as well as one man who had a Living Apart Together arrangement, could fall under the category of “visitation fatherhood” .

A central aspect of the narratives that many of the young men created was based around the experience of growing up in deprived neighbourhoods, as well as talking about the places where they were currently living. In some way, it may be argued that the participants were offering the social context for their past and present circumstances. This research indicates that place was an important part of the experience of fatherhood and the accounts offered were generally negative. For example, they used place to explain their stories about getting into trouble, or being involved in gangs or drug dealing. The social networks that they had were often poor, and many spoke of leaving certain environments or friendships behind when they became fathers. However, at times, positives could be drawn from certain friendships, which were sustained over time even when the young men had left the neighbourhood. Some of the young men felt rooted in the places where they grew up or were living, but the majority spoke of wanting to move out. One motivational factor for their desire to move away was to keep their children safe and away from environments that they deemed detrimental for their future well-being. The research findings also showed that their narratives of deprived backgrounds were used to offer accounts of rising above constraints, of going further than maybe what was expected of them, and of trying to carve a new life for themselves. The men who went into higher education or training and those who moved out of their neighbourhoods prior to having children often took those steps with the intention of moving away from those negative environments.

This study suggests that the young men’s experiences of becoming fathers is inseparable from their background, including their ethnicity, on a number of levels. First, their ethnicity affected their experience of fathering in the material way, not having access to economic resources and jobs. It made them re-assess their neighbourhoods and social networks through the fatherhood lens. This often resulted in many of the young men thinking that where they

lived was an unsuitable area for their children. Some wanted to eventually leave to live in other parts of London, or England, which they deemed more suitable. The young fathers used discourses of risk and risk-taking in order to frame their ideas on how they wanted their children to be when they grew up. Some strived for their children to be different to what they had been in their teenage years, wanting them to stay away from trouble and do well in life. These reflections positively affected the way in which they engaged with their children and how they parented. For example, their emphasis on education (discussed in chapter 6) was not casual, they related it to wanting their children to do better in life than they had done.

9.6 Main findings of the study

This research has addressed a gap in the area of young fatherhood by investigating the relationships that young urban fathers from ethnic minority backgrounds describe having with their children. In so doing it has shed light into young men's perceptions of their experiences of fatherhood, and how these experiences may be affected by different constraining and enabling factors. The investigation has focused on their understanding, feelings and experiences of fatherhood, as well as the context in which those took place. This study also considered the values that young fathers hold in relation to fatherhood and it has shed light into parenting practices and the diversity in the forms of involvement amongst young fathers. Thus, one of the main aims of the study, and one of its main contributions, was the exploration of the one-to-one relationship with the child, and how young men assume and enact the role of the father. Overall, the findings from this study challenge the dominant negative portrayals of young fatherhood and offers positive examples of young fathers as parents. It has shown that young fathers can take an active fathering role, even if they are not currently living with the mother.

The study suggests that overall, the young fathers in this research developed their fathering role and identity under adverse circumstances. Adversity can therefore be considered as central to the experience of fatherhood and it consisted of a variety of factors: from structural constraints, to hegemonic discourses on issues such as fatherhood or masculinity, as well as their socio-economic background. Having ethnic minority backgrounds also contributed to limiting their opportunities. Indeed, while there were some young men who were in higher education and had jobs, others were struggling to find stable employment. A minority had turned to underground economy and illegal activities, which is one of the routes often taken by young fathers with limited resources (Kiselica and Kiselica, 2014). For two fathers, this resulted in going to prison, thus losing contact with their children temporarily. In one case it meant that the mother did not allow the young father to meet his daughter. It can be argued that the adverse factors that contribute towards difficulting the father-child relationship are cumulative. This echoes research findings explored in chapter 2 which sees the factors that put young men at a greater risk of becoming fathers as being cumulative.

Key to the thesis is the fact that despite the difficulties encountered, the majority of young fathers were able to fulfill their desire to be there for their children and maintain a relationship with them over time. It can be argued that there are several reasons why these young men were able to be involved and sustain relationships with their children. These reasons include limited or manageable conflict with the mother, family support, and low or non-existing conflict with the mother's family. The research evidence from this thesis suggests that when fathers have a good relationship with the mother of their child, whether they live with her or not, and when their lives are relatively stable, young men seem to be able to manage their father role well. This is in accord with previous research, such as Easterbrooks *et al* (2007) study on the influence of the couple relationship on young men's fathering. Further, family support has been found key in helping young men manage their father role (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2014). Finally, it was explained that the participants were all recruited from organisations where young fatherhood was the core of their work. For this reason, the young fathers from this research may have been more pro-active than others. Belonging to these organizations may have reinforced their identity as fathers as well as increasing their self-esteem, which in turn positively impacted on their fathering role.

This study suggests that the acknowledgement of the multi-faceted, and compatible, roles that fathers can play in their children's lives can be deemed important when researching young men. It may be equally important to be able to separate fatherhood as an ideal, and fathering as a lived reality and a practice that men have to shape according to their circumstances. This is particular relevant when it comes to young fathers, who are often criticised for not being able to provide financially for their children, but who nevertheless may contribute in other beneficial ways, such as playing or educating. I would argue that these other ways to contribute to children's well being, which are taken to be part of an older father's role, can be overlooked in young fathers. Moreover, as argued by Duncan *et al* (2010) a focus on economic provision means that the only route to social inclusion is through paid employment, while active fatherhood is not seen as contributing to that process. Findings from this study contribute to previous research that signal towards fatherhood giving young men the opportunity to turn their lives around. Further, research findings from this thesis demonstrate that for those fathers who had managed to re-direct their lives positively prior to fatherhood, having a child became another important reason to keep their focus.

The importance of these findings is that they provide a move away from the negative views and deficit models of fatherhood and instead concentrate on what young fathers actually can bring to their children's lives, and what they can gain from fatherhood. Some of these positive aspects, it can be argued, are possibly no different to those found when older men become fathers. Equally, it is possible that some of the young men's difficulties are similar to older fathers. For example, the young men struggled with their baby crying, something

that many older parents can relate to (Hogg and Coster, 2014). Furthermore, this study has provided some understanding of the way in which when it comes to the actual parenting role, involved young fathers are no different to older fathers. The young men in this research spoke at length of playing with their children, of educating them as well as caring. It can be argued that when young fathers are present in their children's lives and they fulfill their fathering role, their ability to parent is similar to that of older fathers.

This thesis argues that young fathers are above all fathers and that sometimes the label 'young' can be more constraining than enabling. This is because young fatherhood is often imbued with certain negative connotations. The young men in this study distanced themselves from stereotypical negative images of young fathers, and made use of discourses that put them under the umbrella of the 'new father' (Henwood *et al*, 2003). In this sense, the young men spoke of their emotions towards their children, which were the core of the relationship: bonding, feeling love for them and being loved by them. When they lived apart from their children they often told me how they tried to see them as much as possible, and how they sometimes spent the little money they had on travel fares to visit. Overall, they presented themselves as caring, as wanting to be involved and as trying to improve their lives and those of their children. This was often done against a backdrop of difficulties: problems with the partner, lack of money, physical distance, or lack of time amongst others. To me, what transpired from the interviews is that sometimes against all odds, many of the young men continued to be involved in their children's lives in the mid to long term.

9.7 Application of Social Theory

Using structuration (Giddens, 1984), discourse (Foucault, 1972, 2002) and social capital theories (Bourdieu, 1977, 1994; Coleman, 1998) the young men's accounts of their difficulties and coping mechanisms have been explored. These theories have been used to elucidate young fathers' involvement, their determination and ability to be there and what they contribute to their children's lives. Structuration allows studying the interplay between structure and agency in young men's lives and how young fathers navigate a complex web of situations and deal with adversity. In addition to this, structuration helps shed light into the impact of social structure on young men's experiences of fatherhood. Discourse adds a new dimension to the research, with its focus on the creation of subjects and their potential influence on social reality and in turn on the lives of individuals. The impact of circulating discourses in the lives of young men, either directly or indirectly, is seen as important. Such impact can be both positive and negative. Thus, for example, the accounts of young fathers were influenced by certain discourses, in particular those concerning contemporary fathering and masculinities. A positive direct influence would be how discourses of *new fatherhood* (Henwood *et al*, 2003) give young men an alternative, and one could argue, more attainable role to that of the economic provider. An example of a negative indirect influence would

be how negative discourse on young fatherhood affects professionals and in turn how they may not involve young fathers routinely (Quinton *et al*, 2002; Tyrer *et al*, 2005; Speak *et al*, 1997). Finally, social capital offers an alternative lens to the often used social exclusion viewpoints in much policy and research on young fatherhood. While the young fathers in this study often spoke of deprived backgrounds, they also had access to positive resources, both before and after becoming fathers. These resources, which went from education to family support or good friendships, were helpful in building their role as fathers.

Chapter 3 explored the theoretical and conceptual framework of the thesis, which is partly based upon the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. It is recognised that discourses and discursive practices are part of the social structure, which in turn have the power to influence people's actions. One of the reasons to study young men from the perspective of structure and agency was related to the previously mentioned predominant and opposed views on teenage pregnancy. On the one hand there are the negative conceptualizations that offer a catastrophic and negative view of teenage pregnancy (Kiernan, 1995; SEU, 1999). Negative conceptualisations on young fatherhood in particular offer a view of young fathers as solely responsible for their situation. This points towards an agency view, a subjectivist position, in which the socio-structural influences on the experience of young fatherhood is largely ignored. On the other hand, as explained earlier, in the past few years new research has offered a more positive and less catastrophic view of youthful parenthood (Duncan *et al*, 2010; Arai, 2009; Reeves, 2006). Positive views help balance the debates on youthful pregnancy because they offer an alternative lens by which to explore the issue, however, they sometimes fall under the objectivist position. The objectivist position points towards the structure as mainly responsible for an individual's situation and to an extent make young fathers' victims of their environments. It was argued in the literature review chapter that neither of these views alone are helpful in unveiling the complex situations that young fathers find themselves in (Hoggart, 2012).

Thus it is argued in this thesis that the binary positions generally adopted to explain young fatherhood, either as victims of their background or as completely responsible for their actions, do not offer a complete view of the issue. It is for this reason that Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, which defends the existence of a dialectical and recursive relationship between structure and agency, is considered a good lens by which to explore young fatherhood. Indeed, using structuration as the overall theoretical framework allows conceptualising young fathers neither as victims nor as perpetrators of the structure, but rather as shaping and being shaped by external, socio-structural circumstances. This thesis therefore contributes to academic knowledge in this field by offering a view of young fatherhood that takes into account both the agency and the structural views.

Indeed, while there are times that young fathers are affected by their socio-economic position, there exists examples in which they are able to rise above these constraints. It can be argued that if the young men in this research had no degree of agency, understood here in the definition given by Giddens (1984) as the ability and power to act, their lives would be very different to what they were. For example, when it comes to maintaining a relationship with their children after a break up, the young fathers showed a great degree of power over the situation. Often against a variety of hurdles such as problems with the mother of the child, or being put in prison, they managed to fulfill their desire to be there for their children.

When it comes to this research, as was mentioned, in the course of the interviews it became clear that the social exclusion perspective was not fully representative of the biographies of many of the young men that took part in this study. While most young fathers presented what would typically be characteristic of social exclusion (such as growing up in a deprived area in social housing, being from a single parent household and experiencing trouble with crime), many had trajectories that challenged such backgrounds. For example, either before or after having a child, some of the young men had entered, or were about to start, higher education or training. Thus, education (one of the resources of social capital) appeared central to the fathering role adopted by many young men. A good number of young fathers put value on the power of educating their children to better their life chances. This would call into question ideas of a deficit on social capital based on family form (Coleman, 1990). Finally, many of the young men spoke of the influence of the communities and social networks of their childhood and youth, and the influence of both these aspects in their lives and in their role as fathers, which was the subject of chapter 8.

This thesis used the concept of social capital in order to explore a number of issues. My interest in social capital partly sprung from listening to young men's accounts of their present lives, their future plans and what they aimed to provide for their children. For example, many of the young fathers spoke about their involvement in education. They spoke about how they did educational activities with their children, how important it was that their children did well at school and how they wanted to provide them with better social networks. Thus, while the social exclusion perspective seemed to dominate much research on the subject of teenage pregnancy generally (SEU, 1999; Sigle-Rushton, 2005), it soon became clear to me that a different theoretical perspective was needed. Thus social capital appeared to be the conceptual tool needed in order to cast light onto those issues. In this sense, this thesis contributes to academic knowledge by adding a different perspective on the issue of young fatherhood, one that moves away from solely social exclusion views. First, it shows that young men from deprived neighbourhoods are not necessarily victims of their socio-economic background and can create their own resources. In relation to the role of the father, it shows that young fathers that invest time in their children's education can positively contribute to their sons'

and daughters' well-being. Simultaneously, this moves them away from discourses around the role of the provider and shows that young fathers can contribute to their children's lives in ways that are non-economic.

This thesis offers different perspectives by which to investigate the area of young fatherhood. It allows conceptualising young fathers as active agents who sometimes have to deal with difficult circumstances. It shows that at times the structural influences are too much to conquer, but that at other times with determination young fathers can rise above them.

9.8 Limitations of the study

The focus of this research was upon the young men's interpretation and description of their experience of fatherhood, not on the life-events themselves. I was therefore not solely interested in what activities they engaged in, or in measuring their involvement, but rather the meanings attached to them. Thus for example, one of my interests was young fathers and play. Had I been interested in the kind of games they play, I could have done a quantitative survey, with multiple option questions as to what games they engaged in. Equally, I could have asked how often they saw their children. However, because what was being researched is the young men's perspective on their experiences as fathers, their feelings and emotions, qualitative interviewing was deemed a suitable research method to fulfill the aim. Moreover, I was interested in individual life histories, rather than shared meanings, which meant that other methods, such as focus groups were not considered suitable.

Qualitative interviews are not without problems and one of them is the issue around self-presentation in the interview situation. A criticism that could be made in relation to the reliability of their stories is that the young fathers were showing themselves to me and also to their imagined audience, under their best positive light. However, there are two reasons why I believe that the narratives that the young men offered were reasonably close to their lived reality. First, they gave a great amount of detail on issues such as the cartoons that their children like, the type of games they liked playing, the food they ate or what toys they had as well as descriptions of child characters and moments they spent together. Secondly, and most importantly, they did not always showed themselves as competent fathers, but rather they showed their vulnerability, their insecurities, as well as their inability to cope at times.

Another limitation, which was mentioned in the methods chapter, is the over-reliance on qualitative interviews as a research method. As Silverman (2007:43) argues,

Qualitative researchers' almost Pavlovian tendency to identify research design with interviews has blinkered them to the possible gains of other kinds of data. For it is thoroughly mistaken to assume that the sole topic for qualitative research is people

To a certain extent I agree, and with hindsight, there were other methods or data that I could have taken to explore young men's experiences of fatherhood. For example, one of the organisations from which some of the participants came from, DNA Mix, encouraged young men to explore their experience of fatherhood via different media and one of them was music. Thus, one option would have been to look at the lyrics that the young men produced and analyse them to explore how they felt and talked about fatherhood and the image they wanted to project as fathers. While this would have given a view on topics that were relevant to them, there were a number of areas I wanted to explore. Interviewing allowed me to explore those, in addition to other subjects that the young men brought up, as the interviews allowed a degree of flexibility according to what was discussed. Another method, maybe a complementary one too, would have been to ask the young fathers to keep a diary of their daily experiences of fatherhood. This, however, demands a greater commitment and dedication on the young fathers' side.

It can be argued that building a relationship with the organizations that the young fathers were recruited from, by for example volunteering with them, would have provided me with greater creativity in the generation of data. For example, I could have established a relationship with some of the young men which would have allowed me to ask them to write the aforementioned journal. It would have also meant having weekly interactions with them, which would have given the research a greater depth. While I could have been more methodologically inventive, there are also practical and temporal constraints to all the possible routes that as a researcher I could take. Moreover, getting closer to the young men could also mean that they would not be as sincere with me, for fear of me disclosing information to those around them. However, I recognise that there are many different ways in which data can be produced and future research on young fatherhood would benefit from employing different methods. Finally, as this study was based on single qualitative interviews, one of its limitations is that it offers a snapshot of the lives of young men at that particular time and moment in their lives.

Another limitation to the study is the influence that certain of my demographic and personal traits may have had on the young fathers and therefore on the study. As was explained, the narratives created in this research are seen as a co-construction. And this co-construction is in turn mediated by issues such as gender, age and ethnicity. Being a white woman under 30, being childless, and having what I would call a gentle and curious disposition in the interview situation possibly affected what young fathers spoke to me about, as well as how they spoke about certain issues. An example of this was that none of the young men talked about the sexual relationship with the baby's mother. For instance, those in cohabiting relationships did not point out that maybe one of the rewards of living together was regular sexual intercourse. Moreover, there was not any mention of how the sexual relationship may have changed after their birth. This topic may have been raised if I had been male.

Another issue that I noticed was that while all the young fathers came from ethnic minority backgrounds, they did not often draw on those discourses. There were very few occasions in which this was mentioned. For example Enam spoke about having to follow certain stereotypes because you are “black”. Also in relation to discipline, two young men mentioned coming from African backgrounds and explained how disciplining children was done in their cultures. It could be that my ethnicity did not inspire the young men to bring that subject up, and this may relate to their sense of what I may be interested in. I wondered if I had been from an ethnic minority background myself whether ethnicity would have permeated their narratives more often than it did. When they did speak about their disadvantaged background, they did not relate it to ethnicity. In this sense, it can be argued that these young men placed their lives and narratives in relation to their position on the socio-economic scale.

In order to offset some of these limitations related to my personal characteristics, the use of reflexivity during the research process was an important element. Reflexivity can be described as an awareness of the researcher’s role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research . In turn, this enables the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he or she affects both the research and its outcomes (Haynes, 2012:72). For example, being reflective of my role was an important aspect of the development of the empirical research. As was explained I did five initial interviews, and analysed these in order to proceed with the rest of the fieldwork. Part of this analysis was noticing how I may be influencing the accounts that the young fathers were developing. It is also important to me to acknowledge that the findings of this thesis are mediated by who I am. While the young fathers spoke to me about issues such as the emotional side of being a father, they did not speak to me about sex and generally presented themselves as caring and involved. While these can be taken as being valid accounts, it can be argued that the men focused on these topics because I was a young, white woman. Another aspect of being reflective was noticing how my thinking about young fatherhood developed and changed over the course of the research. It is relevant to point out that, my idea of young fathers was in part influenced by the literature as well as my first supervisor’s experience of interviewing young men. I was therefore expecting stories centered around great difficulties and challenges, around social exclusion and poverty. But instead, I was faced with a group of young men that challenged many of the stereotypes. While their stories contained some stereotypical aspects, these were outweighed by more positive aspects of what being a young father meant for them.

Finally, another limitation is the fact that I did not check my results with the young fathers, due to time pressures, as explained in chapter 4. Had I done so, I could have checked how they felt about how they presented themselves to me, and complete it with how I had reflected on their narratives.

As this is a small-scale qualitative study I cannot claim that is representative of all young fathers. These fathers were drawn from organizations that were involved in the arts, which

meant that they were a particular sample. For example, they had interest in music and lyric writing as well as in dance, cinema and theatrical worlds. This means that this group of young men may have greater self-esteem than other young fathers and show more pro-active attitudes towards life, including being active fathers. Despite this, it can be argued that some of these findings can be applied to other young fathers who are actively involved in their children's lives.

9.9 Future research, policy and practice implications

Several areas for future research can be drawn from the findings of this thesis, its limitations as well as gaps in the research on the subject of young fatherhood.

First there is a need for more studies of a longitudinal nature to add to the few existing ones (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2011). Young fatherhood can be seen as being more susceptible to the influence of external structural forces. It may be argued that young fathers' relationships with their children may be more fragile than that of older fathers. In this study, the difficulties that the young fathers experienced in order to keep a relationship with their children were varied, and depended upon the situation each father found himself in. There may be issues around identity change and the tensions between adopting a father role and being a young man. Others may have difficulties in balancing their immediate interests, for example pursuing higher education, with giving time and energy to their children and partners. Due to this greater fragility one of the ways in which research with young fathers could benefit them would be studying their lives in the long term. This would allow seeing changes and assessing the areas in which young fathers may need more help and support. In short, it would show the strengths and weaknesses in young fathers' abilities to maintain a relationship with their children over time.

One issue that seemed crucial was the relationship between the young father and mother. Thus specifically studying the dynamics of cohabiting, breaking-up, and how they cope with the separation, would seem important. An added topic would be to study non-resident fatherhood specifically. It appears that non-resident fathers are more likely to be unemployed, suffer mental health problems and engage in crime and substance abuse than resident fathers (Fatherhood Institute, 2013). It may not be residency *per se*, but rather the fact that non-resident fathers are at a greater disadvantage which influences their involvement. However, it may also be that their non-resident status may offset the aforementioned potential positive impact that becoming a father can have on a young man. The scarce, yet relevant, research findings with regards to young fathers and residency show that it is an aspect that needs to be explored, as it seems central to establishing, developing and maintaining a healthy father-child relationship.

In relation to the role of the father specifically, the emotional relationship between the fathers and their children would be an interesting and important area to explore. As Dermott, (2008:66) argues “the need to encourage and teach young men to learn or recognise their emotional side can be framed as especially urgent when they become fathers”. Indeed, this research hinted at the importance of the emotional bond in keeping young fathers interested in their children and involved in their lives. A further exploration of this area would thus seem appropriate in order to encourage bonding with the child and subsequent continued involvement in their lives.

The little existing research suggests that young fathers can potentially have an influence on whether a young woman decides to carry on with the pregnancy or terminate it (Evans, 2001; Paschal, 2006; Tabberer *et al*, 2000). However, the young men’s narratives in the course of the interviews put into question how much influence and control young men actually have over the final outcome of the pregnancy. For example, Ali felt very strongly about not wanting the baby, however his girlfriend still took the pregnancy to term. Other fathers explained it in terms of leaving the decision to the partner, putting the main responsibility on the women’s shoulders. As Lohan and colleagues explain,

adolescent men’s involvement is negotiated within the context of a balance of power which rests with the female partner and, thus, their involvement in the pregnancy decision-making is not guaranteed (Lohan *et al*, 2011:341).

This would apply to this study, as young fathers’ agency in relation to the outcome of the pregnancy appears to be limited. This may be an important factor in understanding young fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives. While Ali was initially reluctant to meet his baby daughter and eventually decided to meet her, other young men who do not want to have the baby from the onset may not be involved in their children’s lives. This in turn has implications for the way in which the lack of involvement is conceptualized, adding to the discourse of absent fatherhood and the negative views of young fathers. Understanding how those decisions are made could be important in order to understand future involvement by the young father. Indeed, as was explained in the literature review chapter, Neale and Lau-Clayton (2014) argue that when it comes to decision of whether to carry on with the pregnancy, the mother as well as the maternal grandmother exercise greater agency than the father and his family on the final decision. This, they believe is reflective of a “broader pattern of decision-making and responsibility that resides in the ‘vertical’ cross-generational maternal household rather than residing in the lateral relationship between the young people themselves” (Neale and Lau-Clayton, 2014:78). They further argue that this pattern of decision-making continues into the early years of the child’s life. Thus, involvement at the time of deciding whether to carry on with the pregnancy may be important in determining

young fathers' role with regards to their children's current and future lives .

Due to the characteristics of the sample, this thesis contributes to the knowledge on young fathers from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds and urban backgrounds. It is argued by Pollock *et al* (2005:4) that there is limited knowledge on this group of young fathers and that

the gap tends to be filled with speculation and fantasy often based on unconscious prejudice about whether these young men will 'stay the course' or see themselves as a necessary part of the parenting equation.

Research on young fathers from ethnic minority backgrounds is necessary in order to demystify their experiences of fatherhood. Moreover, as argued by Pollock *et al* (2005:3) "there may be specific issues relating to inclusion and equality of access for young Black men and mainstream maternity services". Research on this particular group can help create services that are better suited to their needs.

When it comes to policy initiatives, it was explained in chapter 3 that prevention work seemed to dominate over support in the implementation of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. This policy approach was found by professionals working with Black Minority Ethnic (BME) young parents as not being particularly helpful and as creating tensions between them and the young people they worked with (Higginbottom *et al*, 2006). Thus the balance between prevention and support may be difficult to achieve. It can be argued that prevention work is an important part of services for young people. Indeed, despite the way in which fatherhood can be a turning point for some young men, the experience can too be considered a difficult one to go through. However, policies are needed that acknowledge the diversity of family forms and are sensitive to the cultural aspects associated with young parenting. Moreover, prevention strategies are often in place as a way of eradicating the supposed negative socio-economic outcomes suffered by young parents. However, research indicates that early parenthood accounts for few of the long term economic disadvantages (DFES, 2007), and thus policies should focus on ameliorating previous disadvantage rather than preventing teenage pregnancy *per se* (Squires *et al*, 2012).

It was argued in chapter two that during the "New Labour" years, young fathers were mainly seen under the umbrella of economic provision, or lack of. It can be argued that policies that are directed towards making young men sole economic providers, with no regards for their difficulties in doing so, may not succeed in the long run. Indeed, in a market economy in

which manual labour is in decline, education and training becomes more important to gain access to employment. To the change of the nature of the market, currently there is now an added issue, that of the recession, which means that there are even less available jobs for young men. Many young fathers grow up in deprived environments which do not offer sufficient or appropriate contacts to access paid work easily. Indeed, as explored in chapter 8 under the ideas of social capital, many young fathers spoke about their limited access to enabling networks.

However, given young fathers' desire to be there for their children (Speak *et al*, 1997; Cater and Coleman, 2006), policies that focus on promoting the father-child bond in the short term may encourage financial support in the longer term. Indeed, given the right support for continuing the father-child relationship, there are chances that those fathers that are involved at an early age will later on financially support their children. What seems more likely is that if the young father loses touch with his child or children due to mounting pressures, he will never provide. By having policies that encourage a long lasting relationship between young fathers and their child(ren) we are exploiting the potential benefit that having a child reportedly has on a young man's life. We can focus on what the young men have to offer both on the short and long term and capitalize those resources. At the same time, the father-child relationship positively impacts on the father and benefits his life, and that of their partner or ex-partner. Generally it is argued that

there remains a lack of focus on fathers as a distinct policy area. This is reflected at local government level, as lead professionals for young fathers are rare and data on the number of young fathers in each local area is not collected (Cundy, 2012:3).

Another aspect that has been central to the experience of young fatherhood is the circulating discourses that often represent them under a negative light (Duncan, 2010). This, it can be argued, has affected the way that young fathers are treated by professionals as well as society at large. In relation to professionals, research shows that on general terms, young fathers are often excluded and invisible, although examples of good practice exist (Sherriff, 2007). Research on professional attitudes and service provision would benefit young fathers in many ways. For example, there is a need for services that understand young men not as a homogeneous group, but one that is marked by differences in relation to ethnic, religious and cultural background as well as age. Moreover, continuity in services, so that young fathers can be supported over time, with their changing needs and circumstances, would also seem appropriate. Finally, services that are designed to support the young couple as a family unit, rather than as two separate individuals, could be of great help given the greater fragility of young couples following the birth of a child and in the early years (Tabberer *et al*, 2000). Diversity, continuity of service provision and couple support are thus three areas which

would be worth both investigating. Putting policies in places to specifically support young families would also help improve the lives of young parents.

9.10 Conclusion

The overall aim of this study was to investigate young men's perceptions of their roles as fathers and what makes it easier or more difficult to sustain them. It has studied the one to one father-child relationship, and the rewards and challenges that involved fatherhood brings to young men's lives. This includes investigating the potential impact of different influences on the experience of being a father in general and on the father-child relationship specifically. These influences include the young men's backgrounds and current situation, such as employment status, housing, the influence of significant others as well as the fathers' childhoods and their social environments as young adults. This study has sought detailed descriptions of the kind of activities that young fathers describe engaging in when spending time with their children. An added area of investigation has been how young fathers' perceptions of their contribution to their children's upbringing and well being. This research has investigated the relationship that young fathers describe having with their children and how it has been shaped by life events and transitions as well as external influences.

The thesis has argued that strengthening the father-child relationship is beneficial not only for the child, but also for the young man. Becoming a father was either a turning point or a reason to stay on the right track for those men who had turned their lives around prior to having a child. At the same time, supporting the young father is beneficial too for the young mother. Thus, it is important to create services that promote young fathers' involvement in their children's lives, given the reported benefits it can potentially offer to the child, the father and the family unit (even if they are not resident). Thus more positive examples may be needed to encourage young fathers to adopt and sustain their role. Indeed, it appears from the narratives the young fathers developed that it was not only the opinions of those close to them that mattered when it came to being involved in their children's lives. The views of professionals and society at large mattered too. Similarly, policies need to focus on offering support and encouragement for young fathers, rather than focusing on the negativity and casting young men as feckless and uninvolved.

Appendix 1 - First interview schedule

1. To explore how young resident and non-resident fathers describe relating to their child/ren and they 'types' of relationships they describe developing over the course of a year.

1.1 How did young fathers feel towards the child, or the idea of having a child, when they found out their partner was pregnant?

Was it planned or was it a 'surprise'?

How did you feel about it?

Did you did you think about how things would be like once the baby arrived? Did you have an idea about the type of dad you wanted to be with him/her, the kind of things you'd do with him/her?

Ask if anything changed in his life- ? What happened generally during the 9 months. What were you doing at the time? Did you move in with the mother? Did you break up?

1.2 How did feelings towards the child developed (up to the point of the interview)?

Where you at the birth? How did that feel?

How did you feel when your child/ren was born?

What was it like between you and your child when s/he was born?

Did you know before that it was going to be a boy/girl? Where you happy that it was a boy/girl? Why?

What were the more difficult bits at the time?

What kind of things did you do with your child before s/he could walk? Did you take him/her out to the town, to the park, stayed at home?

Once the baby could walk and talk, how did it change the relationship between you two? (did you play more/less, did you enjoy the company more/less?)

1.3 What kind of role do they play in the child's life?

This relates to question 2 –

Can you tell me about a normal weekday, what do you do?

What about the weekend? is it any different?

For non-resident – tell me about an average day when you see your child. What do you do? Where do you go?

Do you play games with your child? What type of games do you play?

If you had to describe your self as a dad, what type of dad would you say you are?

What would you say are the best things about being a dad?

What are the most difficult bits?

What type of dad would you like to be now, or in the future?

Non-resident fathers

How often do you see your son/daughter?

If they see each other -What kind of things do you do with him/her when you spend time together? (props – stay at home and watch tv, go to the park...).

If they don't see each other – has it always been like this? how come?

Do you expect the situation to change?

For all dads

How would you describe your child? His/her character, mood, personality?

2. To investigate the impact that outside influences have in the way that resident and non-resident fathers feel about their child/ren and how their perception of their roles changes, or not, as a result.

2.1 How do the material resources that fathers have help or hinder the father-child relationship?

Employment situation – discuss how it affects the relationship with the child – who provides they money? If unemployed - Do you have more time to care for the child? How do they feel about it? (I understand this is going to be quite tricky for self esteem/pride issues)

Housing – what is it like in the house/place where you live now? How many people live there?

Does your house make it easy or hard to be a dad and spend time with your child?

2.2 How do environmental factors affect the relationship with the child?

Tell me about the neighbourhood where you live- What is the neighbourhood where you live like?

What is it like as a father to live there, or as a family?

*Do you find it is easier to do things with your child outside your house?
Are there parks or anywhere to go?*

*How is it for your child? (if it only a baby) – what do you think it will
be like growing up there?*

2.3 Which things help the relationship with the child?

*Think about the time since your child was born – throughout this time
...*

*What has made the relationship easy or good and what has made it
difficult?*

*What things do you think would help you have a better relationship with
your child?*

3. To research the living arrangements that both groups of young fathers have and how this influences and shapes the relationship with their child/ren.

3.1 How is the everyday relationship of fathers and their children (in resident fatherhood), and how is it for non-resident fathers when they see their children?

See question 1.3

3.2 How does the living arrangement shape the relationship with the child?

Resident fathers –

At the moment you live with your child, has it always been like this?

Do you enjoy living with your child (and your partner)?

Can you see any advantages about not living with the child?

If non-resident

Have you ever lived with your child? Depending on yes or no.

*Yes – then asked what happened, what it was like and if they think they
will live with the child again?*

No – what is it like to live apart? Do you think it will change?

3.3 Which aspects of their living arrangement helps and which make the relationship more difficult?

*Living/not living with your child, what are the advantages? And the
disadvantages?*

4. To investigate how relationships with significant people around them affect the young father's perception of their relationship with their child.

4.1 How does the relationship with the mother affect the father-child relationship?

How are things with the mother of the child? How does this affect the involvement with the child?

If resident – do you feel you are given responsibility by the mother) – babysitting, taking the child to the doctor?

If not resident-

How do you negotiate contact with your child? Is it easy/difficult?

Do you expect things to change?

4.2 What is the role of the family in encouraging/discouraging the father-child relationship?

How did your parents/mother/father/carer react when they found out?

Did it change over time or remained the same?

How things are now.

4.2 Do friends and peers have any influence on the father-child relationship?

How did your friends reacted when they found out you were going to be a dad?

Do any of your friends have children?

Did people's opinion change once the baby arrived or did they continue to be the same?

Of all the people around you, who would you say is the most and the least helpful in terms of you having a relationship with your child?

Appendix 2 - Second interview schedule

The beginning

- Can you tell me about the time when you found out that your girlfriend was pregnant?
- What was the first year of your life with your child like?

Parenting

Play

- Can you take me through a day with your children?
- What about the weekend?
- Tell me what you do on a sunny day with your child?
- What do you do on a rainy day?

Discipline and joy

- Can you tell me about when you have the most fun with your child?
- Can you tell me when you have the least fun?
- Can you think of a time when your child/ren threw a tantrum or misbehaved and what you did?

Image that they as a young father want to project

- Can you tell me about a time when it feels good being a dad?
- Can you tell me about a time when it felt not so good?

Places and spaces

Housing

- Can you tell me about the house or houses where you and your children have lived since they were born?
- Can you draw here the house in which you spent the most time with your children?³²

Community

- What about the neighbourhood or area where you and your children live? What is it like to bring up children there?
- Here is a map of your area, could you tell me about the places where you go and do not go and why?

³² This question was eventually dropped as I realised after a few interviews that it was not yielding good data.

Relationship with the mother

- Can you tell me about the relationship you have with the mother of your child?
- What do you and the mother/your partner most fall out about?

Help and support

- Looking back at all the time since you have become a father, can you think and tell me about the things and people who have helped you the most in forming a relationship with your child?
- And can you think of a time when you felt something or someone was getting on the way of you and your child?

Appendix 3 Pen portraits of the young fathers (listed alphabetically by pseudonym)

Abiola (19)

Abiola was born in Nigeria and moved to England when he was 1 year and 9 months old. He had a 2 month old son and was about to start university in London, where he lived. During the pregnancy and after the birth both Abiola and his girlfriend stayed at their respective parents' homes. They planned to stay together. One of his main worries was how to juggle university with a part-time job (which he was planning to get) and spending time with both his son and girlfriend.

Akram (19)

Akram was the participant who had become a father at a youngest age, being 15 when he had his boy. He lived in London and his child lived on the outskirts with the mother and her family. Although they were no longer together they were on friendly terms and he described visiting his son on a regular basis. Akram's mother and siblings, who also live in London, do not know that he's a father. His dad lives in Africa and he doesn't see him. He is studying drama full time.

Ali (17)

Ali had a 3 month old daughter whom he'd known for 2 months. Initially he spoke of not wanting the baby and even when she'd been born he was reluctant to meet her. Eventually he did and was now involved in the child's life. He stated he didn't want to be with the mother of the child, and that was one of his current struggles: wanting to be involved with the child but not be with the mother. He was an orphan and lived with his older brother. He was studying and would continue to do so.

Asthon (18)

Ashton was the only father interviewed who had never met his child, who was a 10 month old girl. He described having been involved in gangs and drug dealings as the main reason for which his ex-partner wouldn't allow him to see his daughter. Even though he claimed, that was part of the past now, his daughter's mother would not believe or trust him. He lived alone and was not in work.

Dan (19)

Dan came across as being very settled into family life, despite being one of the youngest

dads interviewed. He was a father to a 2 year old boy and an 11 month old girl and lived with his partner. He described fatherhood as being “*not as hard*” as people make it to be. He was working full time but was thinking of starting a paid training scheme to become a mechanic.

Dominic (22)

Dominic had a 3 year old daughter. For the past 3 years Dominic had been fighting in court for the right to see his child, after being (falsely according to him) accused of physical abuse by his partner. At the time of the interview Dominic saw his daughter regularly and was fighting for shared custody. He was in full time employment and lived in a house by himself.

Enam (24)

Enam had recently come out of jail and was living in his own flat, while his 4 year old son lived with his partner. He was still trying to re-gain his partner’s trust and he was determined not to get involved in crime. He was self employed and was trying to set up a design company.

Eric (24)

Eric was one of the fathers in the group who’d had his child at an older age, as his daughter was just 6 months. He was still with the mother but they lived on separate council homes, opposite each other. He was a part-time student. Eric was born in Cote d’Ivoire and moved to France as a child. He then moved to the UK. At the time of the interview he was studying aromatherapy.

Finley (24)

Finley had shared custody of his 4 year old son. Finley cohabited with his now ex-partner and son for two years, and after that time the relationships started deteriorating. As a result to the break up he had difficulty seeing his son, as his ex-girlfriend reportedly did not let him. Eventually he won the right to having him half the time. Finley was not working and was involved in music making.

Greg (20)

Greg had a 3 year old daughter who lived with her mother. He described how he had been dating for her 4 months when she fell pregnant. He talked about their relationship in very ambiguous terms, stating they were not really together but insisting he didn’t want her to

have children with someone else and suggesting they would be together once they both had finished studying. At the time of the interview Greg was in the first year of his degree. He paid regular weekend as well as mid week visits to his daughter.

Jayden (20)

Jayden had a 3 month old son who has been living with foster parents from when he was 6 weeks old. He did not want to tell me about the reasons for which his son ended up in foster care. Jayden showed a great deal of technical knowledge about childcare, from his contact with professionals. He was still with his girlfriend, who was present during part of the interview. His aim was to have his son back.

Justin (24)

Justin had 3 sons, twins aged 3 years old and one aged 2 years old. He lived with them for 2 years until him and the mother broke up. During those 2 years he described several house and job moves. He spoke of tension with the mother in term of his role as father, struggling with providing and caring. At the time of the interview he was working full time, had a new partner and saw his children regularly.

Kieran (21)

Kieran was father to a 6 month old boy. He and his partner met when they were both living in a hostel and after spells of being homeless they were now living together in a council flat. He described tensions in the relationship with his partner and was unsure of their future together. He was doing temporary jobs and was thinking of getting into a training scheme to become a plumber.

Mark (23)

Mark had a 7 year old son whom he'd lived with for the past 3 years. He and the mother have always been in a relationship but for the first 4 years she lived in another neighborhood while he lived in his own flat. He was looking for work.

Marvin (20)

Marvin had a 4 year old step-daughter, aged 4, and a 2 month old daughter. He and his partner had a relationship as teenagers, broke up, she got pregnant by someone else. They got back together when her daughter was 8 months and had been together ever since. They were cohabiting and he was unemployed.

Mason (21)

Mason had a 4 year old son who was currently living with his parents as he and his partner had been put in jail for reason he didn't disclose. He described life being good before jail, with the 3 of them living together. After going to prison him and his partner broke up, although they were still on good terms. He was waiting to hear back from an internship and his aim was to get his son back.

Max (23)

Max was a father to 2 boys aged 6 and 3. He had recently split up with the mother of the children, after living together for 5 years, and had moved to his own flat. He was not in employment and described himself as a music artist. He spoke of spending time with the children on a regular basis. He was still on good terms with the mother and didn't rule out getting back together with her in the future.

Ryan (22)

Ryan was born and grew up in north-east London with his single mother, and he is of African origin. He was at University studying accounting when his girlfriend got pregnant. They moved in together a few months after the birth and he continued his studies. They were experiencing problems and theirs was one of the most fragile relationships

Saleem (22)

Saleem is father to a 2 year old boy, whom he's lived with, along with the mother, since he was 3 months old. When his girlfriend fell pregnant they were both at college. He was looking for work and she was about to start a degree. They were the only parents that took their child to nursery

Steve (25)

Steve was the oldest dad interviewed. He had a 5 year old son with whom he lived for 3 years. He was currently single and living alone and had shared custody of the child. He and his ex-partner had a good relationship and sometimes spent time together with their son. He was currently unemployed and had struggled in the past to find work.

Tim (24)

Tim was a father to a 3 year old boy and an 8 month old daughter. He lived with the children

and their mother. He described his partner as having mental health problems, which he said impacted on his role as father. He talked of being the main carer of the children and how he couldn't work as a result. The future of his relationship was uncertain.

Tyler (19)

Tyler lived with his grandparents since he became an orphan at the age of 4. He described the relationship with the mother in ambiguous terms, claiming they were not together but also saying that neither of them would say they were single. At the time of the interview, the mother of his daughter was spending time in Portugal as she wanted to learn Portuguese. Their living arrangement was very fluid, as the care of the child was shared amongst him, his grandparents, the baby's mother and her family. He was in temporary employment and considering going to university.

Appendix 4 – Leaflet to recruit participants

Are you under 25 years old? Are you a father?

My name is Rosa and I am a student at the University of Greenwich. I am doing a research project about young fathers and the relationship they have with their child/ren. For it, I would like to interview a few young dads like yourself and this is why would like to invite you to take part in a 1 hour interview. I am giving £25 for each interview to anyone who takes part, as my way to say thank you for your time and for taking part in it.

What will the interview be about?

I want to hear your experiences as a dad and about your relationship with your child, whether you live with them or not. The issues that I would like to talk about are things such as how much time do you spend with your child, what do you do with your child when you spend time together, how easy or difficult it is for you to see your child, and the things that help you have a good relationship with your child/ren as well as those that make it difficult.

What if through the interview I do not want to carry on?

It is important for you to know that even when you agree to come along to this interview it does not mean that you have to go along with it. You can withdraw from the interview before it takes place or during it. Also, if there are any questions that, for whatever reason, you don't want to answer just tell me to move on to the next one.

Will others know about what I have said in the interview?

With your permission, I would like to record the interview. Your name, and that of your child and anyone else you may talk about, will be changed, so you can remain unknown to those who will read the project. You can also ask me to stop the tape at any time during the interview.

Contact me

If you would like to know more about the research or want to ask any questions or you want to take part, you can e-mail me on r.m.panades-blas@gre.ac.uk or text me on 0774 7586 625, and I will call you back.

Thanks for taking the time to read this leaflet,

Rosa

Appendix 5 – Interview Participants Form

Participant's form

I would like you to read through this form and make sure that you feel you understand what the interview will involve and why you are taking part.

Who am I and what I am doing

My name is Rosa and I am student at the University of Greenwich. As you know, I am doing a research project about young fathers and the relationship they have with their child/ren and for it I am doing some interview with young dads like yourself.

The interview

I want to hear your experiences as a dad and about your relationship with your child. The issues that I would like to talk about are things such as how much time do you spend with your child, what do you do with your child when you spend time together, how easy it is for you to see your child, and what do you think would help you have a good relationship with your child/ren.

The interview will take about an hour. It is important for you to know that although you have agreed to take part in this interview, this does not mean that you have to go along with it. You can withdraw from the interview at any time and you don't have to give a reason for it. Also, if there are any questions that, for whatever reason, you don't want to answer just tell me to move on to the next one.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview. Your name, and that of your child and anyone else you may talk about, will be changed, so you can remain unknown to those who will read the report. You can ask me to stop the tape at any point.

Confidentiality

Most of the information will remain confidential and anonymous, however, if you tell me things that involve hurting or neglecting child/ren or breaking the law, I may have to give that information to your social worker or any other professional involved in your life.

I understand the interview proceedings
Date and signed.

Appendix 6 – Participants' information form

Participant's Information

Interview date:

Date of Birth:

Ethnic background:

White British

Black Caribbean

White other

Black African

Indian

Other Black

Pakistani

Chinese

Bangladeshi

Other ethnic group

Other Asian

Employment

Employed full time

Full-time student

Employed part-time

Part-time student

Self-employed

Other

Education

Age at which left school:

Qualifications:

Their child/ren

How many children do you have?

How old?

Who do they live with?

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