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**Boyhood to Manhood  
in one Pregnancy.  
Adolescent Fathers:  
A Discourse Analytical Study.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Psychology  
at Massey University.

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## **ABSTRACT.**

This study explores the experience of adolescent fatherhood using the techniques of discourse analysis as developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). Twelve adolescent fathers were interviewed (ages 16 to 20 years). All had become fathers before turning 19 years of age. They were recruited from either the local community or were referred to the researcher by guidance counselors at select secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Six major discourses were used to construct the experience of adolescent fatherhood. These were: (a)The responsibility discourse. All said they had made major personal and social adjustments to ensure the welfare of their child: (b)The compromised discourse. This positioned their role as a father compromised by societal disinterest and disdain : (c)The agent for change discourse. Fatherhood disposed them to discard self-injurious habits and to cease asocial behavior: (d)Duel identities discourse. Parenthood during adolescence acted to bifurcate their identity: (e)The premature discourse. Accelerated entry into adult roles attenuated their performance as a father: (f)The improvement discourse. Many spoke of wishing to raise their offspring without the detractions which featured in their own childhood. Fatherhood gave many a powerful sense of purpose. Except for those who were prohibited access to their children, all stated the role of being a father was their primary identity and it had an overall beneficial effect upon their lives.

## PREFACE

In 1998 my first child, Liri was born. His birth changed my life and I sought every opportunity I could to be with him. At the time I was a high school teacher and with the school's approval, I sometimes took him with me to teach my junior classes. The school had a decile 3 rating and was notable for its very high pupil exclusion rate and the low SES of its catchment. One of my classes at the time was a low ability Year 10 class. The students in it had minimal academic ability and adjustment issues within the class were plentiful. To my delight, I found taking Liri with me into this class had a pacifying effect on the students. Many female students requested to hold him and gave me unsolicited advice on his feeding or play needs. Several males who displayed antipathy for staff, showed fascination for my baby son, and would regularly ask to hold him or play with him. When Liri was in the class, students seemed to be less confrontational and focused more attention on Liri's play, than my instruction. Two years later my second son Rufus was born. By the time he was 18 months old, three of the students from the above class were fathers themselves and one had two children. All three were less than 17 years of age, and in what seemed to be in precarious positions to parent. This study explores the experience of fathering from the perspective of males in such circumstances, and the linguistic resources with which they construct it.

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The twelve young men who were prepared to discuss their experience of being an adolescent father. This work is a testament to the honesty and openness with which they accounted their experience of being a father when one is still an adolescent.

Dr. Keith Tuffin who guided me through the principles of discourse analysis and oversaw my research.

My wife Lisa Mrkusic, who patiently awarded me the time to devote myself to this work.

And my two sons, Liri (aged five) and Rufus (aged two and a half) would like to thank this thesis for being so patient. Patient as I heeded their requests to play, dance, read stories, draw, cycle, bath, play soccer, build duplo, watch Thomas the tank engine videos, walk in the bush and generally spend my time with them, rather than attend to this work.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The term 'adolescent parenthood' entered the lexicon of social problems in the early 1970s. Criticism of it rested on the assumption that adolescents are different social beings from adults and unsuited to parenting. Mauldon(1998) summarized this viewpoint by stating parenthood is essentially an adult task, so adolescents should not engage in it. Its occurrence is generally believed to be predominant amongst a portion of the population ill-equipped to parent, and detrimental to all concerned (Wei, 1999) . It also has strong implications of long term social welfare dependence(Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). McAdoo (1990) postulated that as it is associated with a non-normative family cycle, it is considered inherently problematic.

Adolescent parenthood itself, has almost become synonymous with adolescent motherhood. Relatively little research has been devoted to its counterpart, adolescent fatherhood (Thornberry, Smith & Howard, 1997).Testimony to this is the almost de rigueur prefacing of any scholarly work examining the topic, with a statement detailing the dearth of research surrounding this issue, e.g., Goodyear, Newcomb and Allison, (2000); Allen and Doherty, (1996); Pirog-Good, (1996); Landry and Forrest, (1995); Hanson, Morrison and Ginsburg, (1989). The first academic examinations of adolescent fatherhood appeared in the early 1970s. However between 1973 and 1985 there were only 85 publications on the topic(Robinson & Barret, 1987). Those publications were of mixed value, with sizable amounts of it focusing on demographic information and statistical reports of behavior. Little interest has been shown in the subjective experience of fatherhood during adolescence(Allen & Doherty, 1996). Generalizations about adolescent fathers are often drawn from every population but the fathers themselves, and in-depth information about them is rare (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Recently there has been a shift to include scholarly examination of the forgotten half of adolescent parenthood (Resnick, Chambliss &Blum, 1993). This work attempts to add to that movement, giving adolescent fathers themselves an opportunity to give their account. It also seeks to launch investigation of the issue within New Zealand society specifically, as the topic has received scant academic examination here.

### **Defining Adolescent Fatherhood.**

Using Ericksonian stages of identity development Newman and Newman (1991) defined early adolescence as the period from 13-18 years. They claimed the primary activity of early adolescence was identity focus and as such it was characterized more by affective than cognitive development. During early adolescence a transition from a state of dependence to independence was commenced. Nowadays the exact boundaries between adolescence and adulthood are blurred and vary according to one's SES. Lengthy involvement in education keeps many middle class adolescents in dependence much longer than it did their parents. For many working class males the traditional indicator of economic independence and adulthood, the first pay packet, has become increasingly elusive (Phoenix, 1991). The degree to which fatherhood can be considered premature, rests upon the degree to which it stifles an adolescent's development and preparation for adult life.

This research adopts Newman and Newman's (1991) parameters of adolescence. Although enormous variation does occur within this period, it is a period defined by normative psycho-social activity, and fathering during this time is not normative (Montemayor, 1986). The term adolescence has been selected rather than teenage-hood. The latter operationalizes the developments during this period solely in-terms of age. Age is just one component of those developments, and in itself is not a causative factor. The term has been retained where research participants have used it to describe themselves.

### **Historical Construction of Adolescence.**

Adolescence as a conceptual period of semi-independence emerged only in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Demos & Demos (1969) claim before that period, children were treated as miniature adults and adolescence was not a separate stage. As the rural agrarian society was displaced with an urban industrial format, a discontinuity of age groups emerged. Adolescence became a period during which young citizens could acquire the resources with which they could take their place in the capitalist market economy. Scholarly research gave credence to the concept with G. S. Hall's seminal work "Adolescence" (Demos & Demos). This work defined that period and demarcated its

parameters. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century these parameters have expanded, encroaching on childhood in one direction and adulthood in the other (Aries, 1962). Vinovkis(1988) debated the existence of adolescence prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All researchers agree that in the Western world adolescence is a distinct and often emotionally tumultuous time.

### **Explaining the Dearth of Research**

The dearth of research into adolescent fatherhood is not surprising given the limited size of the population and their inaccessibility. Societal factors have also countered against examination of the issue, particularly strong stereotypes which can act to misinform examination. What follows is a summary of reasons why this area has remained unexplored..

#### ***Accessibility of teen fathers.***

Allen and Doherty (1996) state the major obstacle to research in this area is locating and recruiting participants. Often they are omitted from studies of adolescent parenthood as they do not reside with their child's mother, so their interest in parenting is assumed to be minimal (Earls & Siegal, 1980). Heatherington Bridges and Insabella (1998) criticized this conjecture as failing to consider the degree to which mothers and maternal grandmothers can act as gatekeepers to children. Due to poor accessibility, a large portion of North American research has been conducted in inner city housing projects, where high population densities provide a greater number of participants/km<sup>2</sup> (Hendricks & Montgomery, 1984; Furstenberg, 1980).The likelihood of encountering adolescent fathers is thereby increased. The results of such research are of limited relevance. Such urban environments generally house specific racial groups of low SES. In the wider community Simms and Smith (1986) found adolescent fathers difficult to locate as they are less likely to be at home in the daytime, and are physically more mobile than young mothers. They also found the less paternal input a father has, the more inaccessible he is.

#### ***Participant wariness.***

Adolescent fathers tend to be wary of researchers. Some fear being tainted by negative stereotypes surrounding adolescent paternity (Robinson, 1988). Societal norms regarding

parenthood are pervasive and impartial examination can be difficult. Even the most rigorous researcher is influenced by the dominant social ideologies (Phoenix, 1991). Others may assume the researcher is involved in measures to obtain child support (Sander & Rosen, 1997). Many adolescent fathers, and especially those from the working class, are not given to discussing their feelings, particularly with strangers (Simms & Smith, 1986). Familiarity can circumvent this wariness. This research benefitted from the author knowing a number of adolescent fathers, having taught many of them in a local high school. Such participants displayed little or no reserve discussing their emotions and concerns. Several also found the opportunity to discuss their fatherhood therapeutic.

### ***Relative male-female age differences***

There is a low ratio of adolescent fathers to adolescent mothers as not all children born to such mothers are fathered by an adolescent. Older fathers are normative in Western society (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Hanson, Morrison and Ginsburg (1989) put the average male age difference between 2-3 years senior that of the mother. Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Chase-Lansdale, (1989) put the portion of children of teen mothers fathered by men 19 years or younger, at over half of all births. Using American National Statistics Kesilica (1999) puts it at 30% of all births to adolescent mothers (13-19 years). Other researchers estimate the figure to be between 20-25%(Cervera, 1991) and 18-35%(Landry & Forrest, 1995). Most first time adolescent fathers are between 18-19 years old at the time of becoming a father (Dearden, Hale & Woolley, 1995). Cultural and geographical variations in this pattern occur. Amongst the Afro-American community male-female age variance is not as large as that in the White American community (Dallas & Chen, 1998). This serves to increase the number of Afro-American adolescent fathers, hence their frequent participation in research. Although this research makes no quantitative claims, some departures from the above findings are notable. Of the 12 participants in this research, three fathered children to females at least two years their senior. Again an issue of relevance is raised, as all of the research cited in this section has been completed in the United States.

### ***Non reporting by mothers***

The exact number of adolescent fathers is difficult to assess. In New Zealand the number of adolescent mothers who choose not to record the father's name on their child's birth certificate is unavailable. Neither Births Deaths and Marriages, as a sub-department of the Department of Internal Affairs, or the Department of Statistics record this information. In the United States over two thirds of unmarried adolescent mothers fail to declare the father on the birth certificate (Adams, Pittman & O' Brien, 1993). Their reasons may include the child being a product of incest, rape, or exploitative sexual relationships (Furstenberg et al. 1989). Landry and Forrest (1995) found fathers for whom age is unreported are considerably younger than reported fathers. Data supplied by mothers regarding unreported fathers was often found to be inaccurate, and important details omitted. Most data sets record information only about the mother and omit even the most fundamental details of the father (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). For some teen mothers, the father of their child may be viewed as part of an exploitative socio-economic system which subjugates females (Ineichen, 1984). In these circumstances data may be withheld or distorted. Additionally females who have multiple partners may have difficulty assigning paternity. Males are less likely to take an active role as a father if their paternity is suspect.

Within New Zealand the only record of the number of children born to adolescent fathers is that tabulated by the Department of Statistics. Their raw data is supplied by the Department of Internal Affairs. Mothers are not obliged to name the father of their child or give any details of him. As a portion of mothers do not name the father, the below data can be considered to understate the actual number of births fathered by adolescent males. The exact number of mothers who do not report the identity or age of the father is unavailable for comparison.

Table 1: Total Live Births by Age of Adolescent Father as Reported on Birth Certificates for the period 1/1/2001-31/12/2001.

Age of father	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years	18 years
No. of live births.	0	2	5	41	95	288	457

*Source: Statistics New Zealand.*

### ***Sociological conditions***

Parke, Power and Fisher (1980) attribute the paucity of research in this field to the maternal centered basis of our societal concept of the family. This they state is acutely so for those involved in adolescent pregnancy, with fathers seen as shadowy background figures. Vinovskis (1988) stated in North America, most people consider the socialization and nurturing of children a female task. Males are thereby considered peripheral except for economic provision. Even this position he states, has been undermined by social welfare policies. Rickel (1989) attributes the almost exclusive focus on the female dimension of adolescent parenthood to a popular stereotype held tacitly in social science. Adolescent males she states, are unfairly considered to be disinterested in their offspring and unable to be relied upon to parent them. One could postulate adolescent fatherhood is anathema to the lifestyle academics choose, so it is vulnerable to being stereotyped or neglected by them. This neglect cannot be assuaged by the misconception that what applies to adolescent mothers, also applies to adolescent fathers (Lamb & Elster, 1985). This state of affairs is self perpetuating. The almost exclusive focus on adolescent motherhood discourages exploration of its male counterpart by the lack of available research upon which to launch an inquiry (Luker, 1996). Popular literature maintains this neglect of adolescent fatherhood. For example in May 2001, North South magazine ran a feature article on teenage pregnancy. At 8500 words and 11 pages long, the story had only two mentions of teen fathers: one a statistical reference, the other a negative description of a teen dad by his ex-partner (Coddington, 2001)

### ***Popular antipathy to adolescent fatherhood***

Until the mid 1980s, popular myths were more instrumental in (mis)informing the public regarding adolescent fatherhood than academic research. These myths lumped all adolescent fathers into one disinterested group who sought only their sexual gratification. Robinson(1988) provides a taxonomy of such myths. They are (a) the super stud, worldly wise and self centred; (b) the Don Juan, sexually exploitative of young females; (c) the macho male, feeling psychologically inadequate he is driven to prove his manhood by impregnating young women; (d) Mr Cool, emotionally flat and unconcerned with the products of his sexual exploits; (e) the phantom, a shadowy figure who uses young females and then deserts them. Associated with these myths was the belief that adolescent fatherhood was entirely nefarious, and therefore research was unnecessary (Furstenberg, 1976). Partners of teen mothers were better known by their stereotypes than their nature (Elster & Lamb, 1986). Robinson censures the academic community for relying on such impressions when formulating their theoretical perspective. The assumed disinterest adolescent fathers had in their offspring is evident in researchers use of the term 'putative father'. This implies uncertainty and a lack of commitment on his part. It also contributed to a neglect of services for teen fathers as it was assumed they were disinterested in parenting (Allen-Meares, 1984). Fanning such myths was the falling marriage rates (Adams, Pittman & O'Brien, 1993) which were interpreted as the unpreparedness of males to commit themselves. It has become increasingly clear, however, that socio-economic factors had a far greater bearing upon marriage rates. These diminished the preparedness adolescent males might have to commit themselves in an uncertain economic climate. Adams et al. found even if a young couple did enter into marriage, this offers no guarantee of family stability.

### ***Summary.***

Difficulties in accessing, wariness of researchers, easily typecast and open to social castigation, all these factors mean adolescent fathers are generally known more by their stereotype, than by their nature. That stereotype plus popular concepts regarding parenthood, fuel some of the societal concerns regarding the viability of fatherhood prior to the third decade. Academic examination has added to, but also refuted the legitimacy of some of these concerns.

### **Societal Concern Regarding Adolescent Fatherhood.**

Social disapproval of adolescent fatherhood needs to be considered from the position that social problems are construed only by the degree to which the rule they break is considered to be axiomatic (Murcott, 1980). Working in the UK, Phoenix (1991) observed that most women [and men] who become adolescent mothers [fathers] hail from groups which are socially devalued and often arouse public concern. Namely females in the lower SES sections of society and females of colour. This observation applies equally in New Zealand, with Maori, Pacific Islanders, and lower SES females and males being over represented amongst adolescent parents. It casts suspicion on the given reasons for social opprobrium (Phoenix). Below are areas of concern regarding the issue of adolescent fathering, as detailed in the research literature.

#### ***Developmental unsuitability for parenting.***

The belief that adolescent males are developmentally unprepared for parenthood, with limited moral reasoning and little ability to make unemotional decisions, is central to the criticisms of adolescent fatherhood (Belsky & Miller, 1986; Elster & Hendricks, 1986). Rickel (1989) described adolescence as a time of psychological upheaval. A period notable by identity formation and emotional immaturity. This she claimed positioned adolescents as clearly unsuited for parenthood. Many researchers have formulated adolescents as immature, selfish and unable to provide emotional support (Lamb & Elster, 1986; Chilman 1985; Cervera, 1991). Moroz and Allen-Meares (1991) detail this common perception, describing adolescents as present centred, ego centric and seeking immediate gratification. This state is compounded by the fact that most adolescent fathers become parents prior to living independently, securing adequate employment, or completing formal education. As such they lack the emotional maturity required for parenting (Heath & McKendry, 1993). Such criticisms spring from Ericksonian (1950) concepts of identity development. He claimed adolescence is a period in which one searches for identity, and attempts to resolve issues of intimacy. Turning one's focus outward during this period, to address the needs of an infant, is therefore deleterious. An adolescent father would find parenting difficult due to his own diffuse personal identity. This criticism seems reasonable, however, Erickson completed no primary research upon adolescent fathers specifically.

Adolescent fathers have been found to be concerned about their dual identities as adolescents and parents (Panzarine & Elster, 1983). This concern centres around the mutually exclusive roles of each identity. One could suggest the term adolescent father, is almost oxymoronic. Empirical research shows young males have little knowledge of child development (Jones Harris, 1998) and are more likely to demonstrate ineffective parenting techniques compared with older parents (Jorgensen, 1993). They vocalize less, have fewer positive exchanges with their children, experience more anxiety and are more likely to report that parenting is hard work (Jorgensen). Robinson (1988) states adolescent parenting necessitates disengagement from one's peer group, and the loss of possible support networks during such time. This would apply to select populations but not to those where adolescent parenting is a normative activity. As to be expected, variance is found in the nature of parenting according to age. The younger the father, the less prepared he is for the role (Ineichen, 1986). By the time he is 17-18, most have adjusted to the somatic and cognitive changes of puberty (Sahler & McAnarey, cited in Stevens-Simon & Nelligan, 1997) and are prepared for role expansion.

***Inter-generational pattern of adolescent fatherhood and family instability.***

Adolescent fathers tend to continue an inter-generational pattern (Lerman, cited in Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Christmon (1990) found this occurs in families where fathering a child prior 20 years of age is not considered deviant. Dallas and Chen (1998) noted this inter-generational process is not as rudimentary or conclusive as commonly thought. Nor does it predispose children of such fathers to abandon their own offspring. If one's father does choose to be unavailable, this can actually increase an adolescent's resolve to parent his own child. This is significant as Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan (1987) found males who become adolescent fathers are more likely to report growing up without an adequate father figure. Dallas and Chen also noted those who were deserted can cite the need to battle such a trend of desertion as a reason to remain accessible to their children. Memories of the pain of their own father's absence, can be instrumental in adolescent fathers committing themselves to fatherhood (Allen & Doherty, 1996). The pattern of inter-generational transmission is not pre-determined. Furstenberg et al. found only 11% of males born to adolescent mothers become

adolescent parents themselves. Figures on the age of their father were not gathered in their study.

Moore and Rosenthal (1993) found many males are unable to cope with the stresses of adolescent fatherhood and leave their partner early in their child's life. The precariousness of the job market for those with few skills also works against a single economic unit (Adams, Pittman & O'Brien, 1993). Often fiscal factors drive the father to live apart from his partner and child (Earls & Siegel, 1980). This however, should not be inferred to mean they also make themselves unavailable for parenting. Some adolescent fathers fail to appreciate the gravity of the family unit they have established and behave with reckless disregard for it. Moore & Rosenthal found many adolescent mothers complain of their young partners infidelity.

***Restricted opportunities for economic self-advancement.***

Choices about appropriate times for child rearing rest upon economic opportunities and cultural practices (Mauldon, 1998). The once traditional prerequisite of obtaining the necessities of life prior to fatherhood, no longer apply in economic climates where guarantees of lifetime employment are slim and social regulations generally ignored (Belsky & Miller, 1986). Adolescent fathers enter the labour market earlier than their peers, and for a period earn more than them. In the long run though these circumstances are reversed (Pirog-Good, 1996). Such fathers complete fewer years of education than adolescent non-fathers, even when their family's personal characteristics have been taken into account (Pirog-Good). For those who attend to their parental duty, the tendency to postpone career and training ambitions is of central concern. This initial postponement of educational opportunity often becomes a permanent deferment. It positions the young man economically disadvantaged for life (Marsiglio, 1986). The earlier at which fatherhood occurs, the greater the disruption to the male's life course development. (Heath & McKendry, 1993). That lost life course may not be as unlimited as some critics consider. Adolescent parenthood is a predominantly working class affair, where members do not have the dreams and aspirations of those in the middle class (Phoenix, 1991). Mauldon (1998) found over three fifths were poor prior to parenthood, and would have remained so had they delayed fatherhood.

The degree to which adolescent fatherhood decreases one's educational achievement and attainment of a SES commensurate with ones' talents and aspirations, depends upon the degree to which the adolescent male commits himself to parenting (Furstenberg, 1991). Dissociation from parenting and partnership minimalizes one's vulnerability, and is most common amongst those with higher SES (Hamburg, cited in Rickel, 1989). It needs to be considered, that all of these findings are based on fiscal calculations. They fail to consider the degree to which fatherhood obliges many adolescent males to commit himself to gainful employment over idleness and self-destructive behavior.

### *Welfare of the child.*

A notable portion of the public criticism of adolescent fatherhood rises from the assumption that through it, the next generation of dysfunctional children is begat (Fagot, Pears, Capaldi, Crosby & Leve, 1998). Children born to adolescent parents run the risk of being unwanted, born into poverty, and exposed to third rate parenting (Robinson, 1988). Robinson argued that it is not solely adolescent fatherhood that prescribes such a bleak outlook, socio-economic conditions compound the prognosis. It is families with the most limited resources who are most likely to be involved in adolescent child-bearing (Hanson, Morrison & Ginsburg 1989). Adolescent fatherhood generally preempts the employment and social experiences that prepare a male for independent adult life (Allen-Meares, 1984). As a consequence their income potential is very limited and their family unit vulnerable to poverty (Brien & Willis, cited in Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Hudson and Ineichen (1991) caution that most adolescent fathers come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Their prospects of truncated education, reduced occupational achievement and family instability due to economic pressure, will have been eminent whether they become fathers or not (Jorgensen 1993). Having an adolescent father may not be the primal cause of a child's desperate outlook. Most children of such males would have been raised in relative poverty regardless of their fathers age (Phoenix 1991).

Offspring of adolescent males who have regular contact with their father, demonstrate clear psycho-cognitive advances over those who do not (Dallas & Chen, 1998). Given the precarious nature of adolescent relationships, and the greater the likelihood of parental separation, there is a realistic concern that the children of adolescent parents

have a higher chance of being deprived of regular paternal input. This precariousness is compounded by the poor education, reduced earning power and job insecurity characteristic of most adolescent fathers (Dallas & Chen). Despite initial expressions of commitment at the outset of fatherhood, a significant negative relationship exists between the age of the child and the amount of contact they have with their biological father (Christmon, 1990; Friedman, 1991). Having strong emotional bonds with a father figure increases a child's emotional functioning, improves their educational outcomes (Furstenberg & Harris, 1993) and social development (Robinson & Barret, 1986). Paternal presence has indirect benefits for the children. Mothers with committed partners are found to be tactically more stimulating and verbalize more to their children than those without involved partners (McGovern, 1987). Some researchers have found children of adolescents have an increased risk of maltreatment (Stevens-Simon & Nelligan, 1998). This risk is reduced when SES factors are controlled for, but not altogether removed. The most salient concerns are raised by Zuravin (1987). She noted risk factors associated with parents who abuse their children are perfectly matched with adolescent parents. These are having children to satisfy unmet needs, obstetrical problems, unplanned births and infants with birth defects.

### *Summary*

The central issue regarding adolescent fatherhood is the belief it is detrimental to all concerned, the father, the mother and the child. The father's possibilities of self-advancement are severely shackled as he attempts to meet the needs of his child. The child's welfare is precariously positioned given the inordinate amount of stress the father experiences meeting commitments for which he is developmentally ill-prepared. The parental dyad is also strained as the two parents cope with accelerated role transition. These issues are confounded with the understanding that most males becoming adolescent fathers hail from a section of society with limited resources and few opportunities. This therefore begs the question, how do adolescent fathers perform as parents?

### **Adolescent Fathers as Parents**

The psychological functioning of adolescent fathers has been almost completely ignored by researchers (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Robinson (1988) considered their operation as fathers to be severely hampered given their likelihood to be poor, with few qualifications, having little job satisfaction, encountering relationship conflicts and lacking even minimal knowledge about child care. What follows is an account of what is known regarding adolescent fathers as parents.

#### ***Emotional connection with their offspring***

For many adolescent males, their first experience of fatherhood is described as one of joy, gladness and pride (Dallas & Chen, 1998). Lalonde (1988) found most fathers have longstanding relationships with the mother of their child prior conception and they generally do not abandon their child or their partner (Robinson, 1988). Many are attracted to the opportunity of expanding on the unit they have with their partner (Mauldon, 1998) and very few children were the product of a one night stand. Dallas and Chen (1998) found the great majority of such males stated fathers are important figures and their role could only be preformed by a father. The form that role took was particularly influenced by the adolescent's own father. Other significant males such as uncles, cousins grandfathers could also act as role models (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Regardless of race, adolescent fathers express concern regarding their child's health, their own parenting skills, and spending enough time with the baby, (Adams, Pittman & O'Brien, 1993). Robinson cites the receptiveness with which adolescent fathers respond to outreach programs as indicative of adolescent fathers eagerness to be involved, competent, and caring parents.

In one study it was found despite positive beginnings, by two years of age 40% of children born to adolescent males have little to do with their fathers (Fagot, Pears, Capaldi, Crosby & Leve, 1998). The tragedy of this is threefold. Primarily for the child deprived of paternal input. Secondly for the mother who is likely to have to raise the child single-handedly. Thirdly for the father, who depending upon his values, knows he has failed to fulfill his most basic duty, to nurture his offspring. Fagot et al.'s findings however, fail to identify that portion of fathers denied access to their child. Decreased

contact could however be due to the adolescent father experiencing conflict between their feelings of responsibility and his inability to meet those responsibilities (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Also the experience of having one's paternal role diluted or supplanted by one's ex-partner's new partner, may generate enormous discomfort. This could be implicit in the decision to withdraw from the role of father (Bolton & Belsky, 1986). Those who choose not to parent display poorer parenting techniques than those who do (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn & Zamsky, 1994 ). Such males also tend to have a more negative view of the role of a father (Simms & Smith, 1986).

Possibly due to their lack of exposure to babies, adolescent males have unrealistic expectations and limited knowledge about developmentally appropriate behavior (Rivera, Sweeney, & Henderson, cited in Robinson, 1988). This can put undue stress upon the child to perform beyond their appropriate age level. In an empirical study, Fagot et al. (1998) found adolescent fathers tended to use physical discipline more often and employ more negative directives than older fathers. These features are characteristic of children who develop adjustment problems. They postulate that possibly adolescent fathers lack the critical skills for guidance and control. Lamb and Elster (1985) found the age of the father insignificant in terms of the social experiences of the infant or father-infant interactions. They stated that regrettably the inordinate combination of factors bearing upon the young father, dispose him to parental failure.

### ***Material provision***

For many adolescent males the primary role of a father is that of an economic provider (Dallas & Chen, 1998). Pirog-Good (1996) noted as most have conservative sex-role attitudes, it is natural for them to consider 'bread-wining' the paramount paternal task. McAdoo (1990) found despite this many lack the skills to maintain a steady job. This passes financial responsibility for their child onto the mother and maternal grandmother (Dallas & Chen). Chilman (1985) found the failure to provide material support is generally due to lack of employment or very low wages, conditions vulnerable to the social economy. Using qualitative studies Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1997) found adolescent fathers contributed a great deal more than was initially assessed using formal census data. They explained this as due to the prevalence of

unreported irregular and in-kind contributions. Lamb and Elster (1985) found many adolescent fathers make numerous informal contributions in the form of clothing, emotional support, food, transport and money. The great majority of those not residing with the mother make contributions at the outset of fatherhood, but this generally decreases over time (Christmon, 1990). Ironically those most equipped to support their children are those least inclined to. Most adolescent fathers from the middle class do not wish to sacrifice their education and career for their child. Rickel (1989) found if the expectant adolescent mother does not avail herself of an abortion, she is generally left to carry the burden of parenthood.

***Positive effect upon the child via the mother.***

Adolescent fathers and expectant fathers have the potential for a powerful positive effect upon their child through its mother. Pregnant females with greater amounts of contact with the father of the child-to-be, express higher levels of mother-fetal connection, than those without contact (Wayland & Tate, 1993). A strong link exists between support from one's male partner and greater displays of affection with one's children (Colletta, 1983, cited in McCue, Horowitz, Klerman, Sung Kuo & Jekel, 1991). One could postulate this could be due to depleted energy associated with single mothering. Unger and Wandersman (1985) found children's relationships with their mother were better when she received support and assistance from their father. Adolescent fathers reported being aware of the value of a positive relationship with the mother of their children and its value for their mutual children (Dallas & Chen 1998).

***Summary***

At the outset of fatherhood, the great majority of adolescent males display commitment to parenting and family life. The toll of accelerated role transition acts to attenuate a sizable portion of that initial dedication, but many continue to perform dutifully. Their youth also acts against them, as they have limited life experience with which to meet their new duties. As could be expected the better the relationship with the child's mother, the better the welfare of the child. Adolescent fatherhood is not a random event and is concentrated amongst select portions of society. What follows is an account of those most likely to experience pre-mature fatherhood.

### **Aetiological Agents of Adolescent Fatherhood.**

Adolescent fatherhood is the result of personal and sociological factors which interplayed months and years before the birth of the child (Thornberry, Smith & Howard, 1997). To appreciate which males are most likely to become adolescent fathers, we must understand those aetiological factors (Christmon, 1990). Fagot et al. (1998) found six key developmental behaviors associated with adolescent males becoming pre-mature fathers. These were (a) parental antisocial behavior, (b) poor parental discipline, (c) antisocial behavior, (d) low SES, (e) low parental income, and (f) poor academic achievement. Using multi-variate analysis only low SES and poor academic achievement were associated with adolescent parenting. One needs be mindful though, that adolescent fatherhood is not the function of any specific behavior. Over 50% of all males at risk of becoming adolescent fathers do not (Thornberry et al.). As could be expected, being involved in a long term relationship with a female is the most significant predictor of becoming an adolescent father (Hanson et al. 1989).

#### ***Academic factors***

In the U. K. the most notable predictor of adolescent fatherhood is a lack of educational achievement. The fewer school qualifications an adolescent male has, the greater his likelihood of fathering a child during adolescence (Dearden, Hale & Alvarez, 1992). Those who become adolescent fathers are more likely to want to leave school early and have parents who are disinterested in their academic progress (Dearden, 1990). They are also more likely to truant and have educational impediments (Edelman, cited in Thornberry, Smith and Howard, 1997). Mott and Haurin (1988) found the lower a male's commitment to conventional values, institutions, and schooling; the greater their possibility of becoming an adolescent father.

#### ***Asocial behavioral factors***

Amongst selected populations, adolescent fathers are three times more likely to be involved in some form of youth offending (Dearden, Hale, & Woolley, 1995) and display greater levels of aggression (Hanson, Morrison & Ginsburg, 1989) than their peers. One study found adolescent fathers more likely to exhibit acting out behaviors as well as

tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use, and to report relationship problems and drunken driving than a non-father adolescent control group (Resnick, Chambliss & Blum, 1993). McLaughlin, Reiner, Reams & Joost (1999) found amongst incarcerated male youth, 20% had fathered a child. They postulated that high risk behaviors (such as unprotected sex, or offending) may reflect the thrill seeking nature attributed to young offenders. They failed to report what the incarcerated fathers thought themselves.

### ***Family structure factors***

A myriad of factors interplay within the realm of family structure and agents predisposing males to adolescent fatherhood. Depending upon the research model and selected population, various factors prove significant or insignificant. Controlling for social status, Hanson et al. (1989) found no relationship between family structure and early fathering. Using British national statistics they also found no relationship between single parent families of origin, low income or family size, and adolescent fatherhood. Others have found significant relationships between family structure and the incidence of adolescent fatherhood. A lower incidence of adolescent fatherhood amongst those from two parent families may be due to such families retaining traditional values regarding parenting (Young, Jensen, Olsen, & Cundick, 1991). Also in such units both parents are available for guidance. These family forms are associated with stable economic conditions. Ku, Sonenstein and Pleck (1993) found males from single parent families have a higher chance of becoming adolescent fathers than those who are not. Such homes are generally headed by females, and adolescents tend to discuss issues regarding sex, contraception and relationships with same sex parents. Young males in single parent households are therefore more likely to rely on the counsel of their peers, than their parent, for such information (Moore & Erikson 1985, cited in Young et al. 1991). These family forms are also associated with earlier initiation of sexual behavior as females pose a less intimidating authority than males. They also spend less time with their children due to employment commitments (Newcomer & Udry, 1987).

### ***Factors of socio-economic status.***

Hudson and Ineichen (1991) described adolescent motherhood as an “*overwhelmingly working class affair*” (p. 3). The same can be said of its male corollary. Girlfriends of

adolescent males with a lower SES, are more likely to have their pregnancy carried to term, than females in a more affluent sector of society (Marsiglio, 1987). Males and females from lower SES sectors of society are also more likely to commence sexual activity earlier than those in the middle class. (Furstenberg, Morgan, Moore & Peterson, cited in Rosenbaum & Kandel, 1990). Dearden et al. (1995) found adolescent fathers more likely to have experienced economic hardship prior age 11 than non-fathers. Many studies have cited SES as a strong predictor of adolescent fatherhood, but it is unclear if it acts as an independent factor.

### *Psychological factors.*

Little is known of the psychological predictors of adolescent fatherhood (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). No difference has been found in adolescent father's self-esteem levels and those of adolescent non-fathers (Beal, 1991). Earls and Siegel (1980) found adolescent fathers more similar psychologically and intellectually than dissimilar with their non-parent peers. Robinson and Barret (1987) found no difference in anxiety levels between the two populations. Their data, however, was gathered from a population amongst whom adolescent fatherhood was not considered aberrant. Beal did find adolescent fathers had a higher sense of locus of control. Possibly due to their having to take stock of their lives as they adjusted to fatherhood. The one finding which is clear, is that males who were popular were more likely to become adolescent fathers than those who were not (Robbins, Kaplan & Martin, 1985). This was one of the few variables with a direct effect upon one's likelihood of parenthood. Hogan and Kitagawa (1985) explicated this stating popular males were exposed to more peer pressure and more opportunities to become sexually active. Some researchers have conjectured affective and anxiety disorders might also prime males to adolescent fatherhood (Kessler, Berglund, Foster, Saunders, Strang & Walters, 1997). Low self-esteem and insecurity associated with anxiety disorders could lead some males to become overly attached to the first romantic partner available. For males accustomed to failure, fathering a child could be the first accomplishment they have ever made, and a source of unconditional love (Robinson & Barret, 1985).

### ***Summary***

Empirical evidence tends to bear out Wei's (1999) analysis, that adolescent fatherhood is concentrated amongst a population poorly equipped to meet its demands. Low educational achievement, a disposition towards asocial behavior and few economic and employment resources all stack against young males as fathers. Considering these factors however one must bear in mind that such circumstances do not predict fatherhood. Additionally these focus on the male prior parenthood. The effect parenthood might have upon him may outweigh his prior unsuitability. The experience though is not without major stressors. A coverage of these is henceforth provided.

### **Significant Stressors on Adolescent Fathers.**

Adolescent fathers are vulnerable to adjustment stresses. Many find themselves hard pressed to provide for their offspring and partner. They must also negotiate an accelerated transition from an unencumbered teenager to father and breadwinner. This necessitates realigning their social and familial connections. The difficulty of these transitions can be compounded by a lack of support and insensitivity to his needs.

### ***Economics and income.***

Most adolescent males who become fathers have few qualifications, and a disproportionately large number have limited employability (Lalonde, 1988). With the decrease in blue collar jobs in urban areas, such males face a general lack of job security. Teti and Lamb (1986) claimed the ability to provide for one's offspring is a central index of male status. If this ability is attenuated or unguaranteed, many adolescent fathers may choose to avoid their paternal duties altogether. They do this rather than face uncertain job prospects and debilitating financial outlooks. Adolescent fathers are aware of the societal expectation for them to support their family (Dallas & Chen, 1998). If a father concludes he can make no valuable contribution, he may choose to make none at all (Ineichen, 1984). Accordingly, Redmond(1985) found a male's level of parental commitment positively correlated with the number of hours he worked.

***Lack of social services and support.***

Most services for adolescent parents are designed for mothers, not fathers (Schaufler, 1998). This neglect of services is often attributed to supposed male disinterest in parenting (Robinson, 1988; Allen-Meares, 1984). Earls and Seigel (1980) attributed the drop in paternal contact after the birth of the child, to the failure of medical and social services to engage adolescent fathers. Adolescent fathers cite this lack of available support as a major obstacle to their parenting (Schaufler). Given that they rarely consider their peers as a source of support (Fry & Trifilietti, 1983) this is significant. It means they can be emotionally isolated during a time when they need assistance in actualizing their concepts about fatherhood (Westney, Cole & Munford, 1986). This is compounded by being put out of life cycle synchrony with ones peers (Montemayor, 1986). Hudson and Ineichen (1991) considered the shame and sadness they may feel to be masked with bravado and indifference. This is particularly so in a culture where males are not expected to request help. Young fathers report often being subject to scorn for having fathered a child whilst so young (Kiselica, 1999). They are also likely to be blamed by the pregnant female's family and possibly excluded (Cervera, 1991). Rather than being viewed as a product of the interplay of a range of societal factors, unmarried adolescent parenthood is generally attributed to individual moral failure (Arney & Bergen, cited in Phoenix 1991).

***Limitations on parenting.***

Many adolescent fathers with limited access to their offspring state their child still remains uppermost in their thoughts (Robinson, 1988). Their access may be limited for numerous reasons. At a time of stress the young mother may turn to her family of origin for support, blocking him out (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). Her family may view the father's contribution as nefarious, (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn & Chase-Linsdale, 1989) and may not wish to share their grandchild (Furstenberg, 1980). His own family may also discourage his active parenting, fearing it could compromise his opportunities (Allen-Meares, 1984). A strained relationship with the mother of the child may undermine the young father's relationship with his child (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Many males state they wish to maintain a committed relationship with the mother of their baby (Robinson), but lack the inter-personal skills with which to negotiate conflict with her and her

parents(Furstenberg, 1980).Some males may find they have been used for no other purpose than to sire a child(Christopher, 1987) with no invitation to co-parent. The nature of the limited access an adolescent father may have to his children is summarized by Bolton's (1980) observation "*paternal absence is [...] sometimes the choice of those power figures surrounding the adolescent female*"(p. 139). It may not be the young father's wish at all.

### ***Summary***

The stress of accelerated role transition is compounded by a lack of social and personal support for adolescent fathers. Having only an adolescent skill base with which to negotiate adult roles stacks against the young male. How they experience these circumstances is the focus of this study. By using a qualitative approach, it provides adolescent fathers with an opportunity to account that position. What follows is a critique of why much of the research to date has failed to explore the issue adequately.

### **Shortcomings of the Research to Date**

Research to date has been hampered by the scarcity of adolescent fathers disposed to being involved in data gathering. This has often led to procurement of data from populations other than that being studied, and failure to define the area of focus. Questionable theoretical assumptions also detract from the value of much research as does a failure to consider alternative positions. Discursive techniques circumvent some of these shortcomings as their epistemological assumptions are not predicated upon sample size and numerical manipulation. Also as findings are allowed to emerge from the 'text', they are not constrained by a pre-formulated theoretical framework.

### ***Unclear definitions of adolescent fatherhood and specific populations.***

A notable criticism of research to date is its lack of specificity and questionable relevance to circumstances in New Zealand. The initial problem springs from a lack of clarification as to exactly from what population the data was gathered. Lerman (1986)for example subsumed adolescent fathers into a larger population of 'young fathers', aged between 13 to 21 years. This confounds age as a variable. A 14 year old is unlikely to experience paternity as a 21 year old might. Other researchers can discuss 'adolescent parents'

without clarifying that all research participants were female (Miller & Moore, 1990; Reis, & Herz, 1987; Massat, 1995). The title of the research may imply both sexes are studied, close examination can reveal an almost exclusively female population. At times researchers may extrapolate from a female population to all adolescent parents (Lamb, Elster, Peter, Kahn & Tavaré, 1986)

Adolescent fathers are not a homogenous population (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993) and as such the relevance of select findings is questionable particularly as a nationally representative sample is impossible to identify (Adams, Pittman & O'Brien, 1993). Many studies examine those in the lower socio-economic sectors of society, particularly select ethnic groups (Elster & Lamb, 1986). Generalizations are made to all adolescent males without consideration to effects of SES or ethnicity. In this regard many of the studies examine populations uncommon in New Zealand, specifically Afro-Americans and Hispanics (McCoy & Tyler, cited in Robinson 1988: Marsiglio 1987). Such American studies are often conducted in large inner city ghettos, with very high population densities and very little physical or social mobility (Brewster, Billy & Grady, 1993). Urban environments such as these are uncommon in New Zealand.

Robinson (1988) asserted that researchers are unable to identify common consequences of adolescent fatherhood. Also populations are compared on features researchers believe to be salient. This instils the researcher's values into the work (Phoenix, 1991). Research seems affixed with the notion that adolescent fatherhood generates solely negative outcomes, for example poor educational achievement, premature termination of developmentally appropriate behaviors and assumption of developmentally advanced roles. This assumption injects the researcher's bias into the work (Allen & Doherty, 1996). The great majority of researchers fail to consider possible positive benefits of adolescent fatherhood. Discursive techniques allow such benefits to become evident. Most significantly though, they set up the possibility of an open enquiry into the broad psychology of adolescent fatherhood from the perspective of the young father.

*Methodological issues.*

Phoenix's (1991) criticism of research into adolescent motherhood is equally applicable to research into adolescent fatherhood. The use of comparison groups assumes the two populations are similar on all features apart from parenthood status. The control groups are often inadequate or the sample size too small for valid quantitative analysis (Hendricks & Montgomery, 1994; Fagot, Pears, Capaldi, Crosby, & Leve, 1998). Validity is also questionable where subjects are paid to participate and are not selected randomly, for example, Hendricks & Montgomery (1983). At a broader level many of the standard tools used to assess parental performance were formulated using middle class circumstances and materials (Phoenix). The behavior of adolescent parents is omitted from such formulations of normative parenting and child development. Consequently, that behavior is defined as aberrant in comparison to normal parenting and development (Phoenix). This is compounded when ratings of adolescent paternal behavior are compared with ratings in the national community, not the select community in which the adolescent male resides (Marsiglio, 1987).

Possibly the most grave theoretical shortcoming, is the almost universal assumption that adolescent fatherhood warrants examination as a deviant behavior. Many researchers fail to take an ecological perspective of adolescent fatherhood, and view it only on a unidimensional scale (Franklin, 1988). The prevalent assumption that all adolescent fathers face a bleak future, is tempered when one considers that given their specific circumstances most of these young men faced bleak futures regardless (Hardy & Duggin, 1988). For disadvantaged youth facing racial discrimination, economic marginalization and living within deprived social environments, parenthood may be an effective adaptation (Luker 1996). Most adolescent fathers reside in communities where adolescent pregnancy is common and unlikely to disrupt one's life course (Rivara, Sweeney, Henderson, cited in Robinson, 1988). Within such an environment adolescent fatherhood is a normative cultural experience which gives a sense of identity and role clarification (Rivara et al). Young males may choose to become fathers when the cost of pre-mature parenthood does not outweigh its benefits (McAdoo, 1990). This may explain why Afro-Americans experience less stress regarding adolescent fatherhood. It acts as a status-marker in a sub-society with few routes to status (Buchanan & Robbins,

1990). Having a child is no obstacle to goals when there are none available (Burton cited in Thornberry, Smith and Howard, 1997). Delaying parenting to seize life opportunities is irrelevant, when no such opportunities exist (Bolton & Belsky, 1986). Researchers often assume problems reside within the adolescent father. Consequently his behavior is framed in personalistic terms, not in terms of the culture and environment in which he operates (Chilman, 1980).

***Failure to consider phenomenological benefits.***

Most research fails to consider the benefits of adolescent fatherhood. It takes a deviant view of the activity and considers only its short comings. For a notable portion of adolescent males who become fathers, the experience is one of self-redemption. Many settle down, cease behaving anti-socially and assume adult duties (Panzarine & Elster, 1983). The role teaches them self-reliance and the ability to engage in unpleasant tasks for long term benefit (Friedman, 1991). It can improve their dedication to a job, and give them something to be motivated about (Simms & Smith, 1986). In one study over half of the participants (n=83) stated becoming a parent made them 'clean up' their life for the benefit of their child (Simms & Smith). Using qualitative means Moezzi (1998) found adolescent fathers were able to describe the experience of fatherhood as growth promoting. They did not see their future as irrevocably damaged or their lives compromised. Even indirect consequences can be beneficial. Montemayor(1986) for example stated adolescent fatherhood “*isolate[s] males from their natural peer group*”(p.13). Given the antisocial nature of a portion of those who become adolescent fathers (Dearden, Hale & Woolley, 1995), isolation from a deviant peer group could be advantageous! All of these considerations counter the claim that adolescent fatherhood “*harms everyone in its wake*” (Robinson, 1988, p. 11). In 1991 Furstenberg claimed the decline in research into the issue of adolescent parenthood was possibly due to many researchers finding the threats associated with it were overstated. Not all adolescent males were as adversely affected by fatherhood as was commonly considered (Montemayor, 1986; Phoenix, 1993). Even using quantitative techniques and controlling for ethnicity and SES, the direct effects of adolescent fatherhood on a males life course, tend to be minor(Chilman, 1980).

### **The Need for Qualitative Inquiry**

Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1998) criticized quantitative research for using simplistic measures to assess paternal involvement. For example quantifying fatherhood in-terms of constructs such as the amount of money contributed or the number of paternal visits per week. Many studies supply large amounts of statistical data but give no impression of the actual experience of being an adolescent father(Parke & Neville, 1987: Kessler, Berglund, Foster, Saunders, Stang &Walters, 1997). Overall researchers have neglected the phenomenology of adolescent fatherhood (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). Preference is given to quantitative techniques that often reduce the practice of fatherhood to cursory measures (Marsiglio, 1995). Possibly the most stinging criticism of such quantitative research is Kitzinger's(1987) comment that it fails to transcend common folklore or lay understanding. Naturalistic techniques allow major themes of experience to emerge. They give participants the opportunity to give in-depth oral descriptions of their experience (Dallas & Chen, 1998). Robinson (1988) states this is significant as most males involved in adolescent parenting have a lower SES and are more likely to have poor literacy skills. Adolescent fathers show a clear preference for giving feeling based responses to inquires (Barret & Robinson, 1982) and report participating in interview style data gathering as therapeutic (Christmon, 1990) Only qualitative inquiry will identify the true sentiments and experience, of adolescent fathers (Furstenberg 1991). With this in mind, this research uses discourse analysis to examine the experience of adolescent fatherhood.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCH TECHNIQUE

The epistemological roots of Discourse Analysis lie within a 'shift to language' that occurred as a result of dissatisfaction with conventional quantitative inquiry. To appreciate these roots, one requires a precis of the backdrop against which discourse analysis evolved.

### Social Science as a Hard Science

Until the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century traditional social psychology operated as a 'hard science'. Its practice as a 'laboratory discipline' can be traced to German positivist research principles. These were introduced into psychology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by students discontent with the American moral-philosophic model (Baken, 1972). These principles were predicated on the assumption that via scientific method, clear unitary laws of human behavior could be formulated (Baken). Objective reality could be ascertained by simple and unmediated observation (Gill, 1995). Human behavior was considered in terms of its separate variables, combined these would explain behavior and identify reliable causal relationships. Social psychology sought to produce broad generalizations regarding human behavior. These could be applied to reduce human conflict (Gergen, 1973). In this fashion psychology mimicked the physical sciences, dissecting the components of its object and expunging compounding variables. Interpretation it was assumed, was eliminated via measurement. This process was considered to produce a "*clear and unmediated representation of the object of study*" (Parker, 1994, p. 2). Analogically, social psychology claimed to do to human behavior, what chemistry did to the elements of the periodical table.

### Crisis in Social Psychology

In the 1970s social psychology appeared to be within a crisis (Elms, 1975). The issues it had seemed prepared to resolve at the end of WW2 remained unanswered (Baken, 1972). The solutions or facts psychology produced were seen to owe their status not to the inherent nature of human behavior, but to the social, historical and political context in which they were generated (Gergen, 1973). Social psychology therefore acted as an account of "*contemporary affairs*" (Gergen, p. 316). The belief that "*knowledge of social interaction can be accumulated in a manner similar to the natural sciences*" failed to hold true (Gergen, p. 316). Sweeping theories proved to have little real

application beyond narrow circumstances (Elms). Psychology had little theoretical guidance and was empirically driven (Elms). Its positivistic tenet that as knowledge accumulates, its accretion leads to a clear description of reality, failed to explain a social reality which is inherently unstable (Gergen, 1997). Rather than provide social psychology with an applicable discipline, positivism shackled it (Baker). The theoretically cleansed environment in which positivist research claimed to be conducted proved to be value laden. Research was performed under a meta-theoretical framework and findings resulted from meanings negotiated within that framework (Gergen). The status of facts was determined only by the theoretical window through which they were developed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To increase the theoretical rigour of research exclusionary designs stripped away the context in which the data was gathered. This severely detracted from the relevance of any findings (Guba & Lincoln). Overall it seemed as if social psychology was entering what Kuhn (1970) described as a paradigm crisis, i.e., “*a pronounced failure in the normal problem solving activity*” (p.74). Out of this crisis arose social constructionism.

### **Social Constructionism and the Shift to Language.**

The realist scientific model claims through scientific examination, the underlying structures which constitute reality are identified (Gergen, 1985). To the contrary social constructionism claims that reality is constructed through social interaction and this occurs principally in text and language (Billig, 1997). The reality which emerges through positivistic codification and categorization is descriptive not of the world's nature, but of the nature of human observation. Language and established categories are used to construct experience in a fashion society assumes to be natural. It is this process of construction, which social constructionism attempts to explicate. Knowledge therefore is something people do together (Gergen), it is not a reified unit encapsulating an object's reality. The discourses used to describe objects, actually function to form them rather than detail them (Foucault, 1969).. Psychology's shift to language acknowledges that therefore an unmediated account of reality is impossible (Parker, 1994) and it cannot be resolved with suppression (Parker, 1989). The collision of subject and object that occurs within psychology, can only be resolved by examining the vehicles of that collision, that is, language. By analyzing language it is seen that psychological noumena

are located in discursive activity, not within an area known as the mind (Billig, 1997). When language is used to demonstrate attitudes, these need to be considered to be attending to social business, for example, justification or criticism, not reporting on a 'mental' state. Attitudes therefore must be viewed within a conversational context with rhetorical meaning and direction (Billig). Unlike elements of the periodical table, they cannot be touched or sifted. The performative feature of language is thereby social psychology's rightful domain.

### Discourse Analysis.

Discourse Analysis considers discourse in-terms of three interconnected concepts: its function, construction and variation (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). Discourse itself can be considered as any form of spoken interaction and all forms of text. In a wider form the whole world itself can be considered like a text (Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1995) given that our perception of it is a semiotic activity which infuses it with meaning. Potter and Wetherell state as positions lie within discourse and not within mentalistic concepts, the very epistemological status of the attitude concept is challenged. Any interpretation of an object is mediated through a select discourse concerned with that specific object (Gavey, 1989). According to Holloway (cited in Gavey), discourses offer multiple positions from which a speaker can construct an account and take a position. Popular discourses appear commonsensical, they perform as neutral commentaries on an agreed reality (Gavey). This is indicative of the first feature of discourse, function.

#### ***Function***

Potter and Wetherell (1988) state discourse operates "*to do things*" (p.32). That is, discourse has a function, an action orientation. It is used to construct specific accounts of the world and achieve select ends. The function could be direct such as the intention of the request "*could you drop me off*". Or it could be indirect such as "*its a long walk home*" meaning I haven't a car, could you give me a lift. Expunging the text from the context, depletes the discourse of its meaning. This is why quantitative techniques fail to add to social understanding. They cleanse from the interaction the very features which make it social. By reading text alert to its functional orientation, one is able to identify the purpose for which it was presented. To do so however, one needs to develop

sensitivity to the way language is used. With particular attention to the inferential and interactional aspect of texts. Functions may have a more global operation. A text's function could be about establishing and communicating favourable or disfavourable images. The statement "*I play with my son all the time*" might be a veritable account of events. But it could also serve to communicate to a listener that one is a devoted father, and rival reports to the counter. It is this latter element which Billig (1987) refers to as discourse's rhetorical purpose. All discourse is set to challenge a contrary position and achieve specific ends (function). In this regard language "*orders our perceptions and makes things happen*" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 1).

### ***Construction.***

In considering a text, one's focus should be on how people construct their accounts of the world, not on what that account is. By examining construction the means by which specific actions are performed are made evident. In the above example the speaker alluded to appreciating a lift home by describing the lengthy distance required to walk it. The construction (comment on the distance to get home by foot) and the function (asking if someone could drive them home) appear unrelated when taken out of context. In context they perform as a well formulated task, to request a lift home. At a wider level language constructs our social reality. Participants actively choose language with which to set a position for themselves, and for others. To take an extreme case, President Reagan's description of Afghani mujihadeen resisting Soviet forces, as 'freedom fighters' constructs them as courageous people of conscience. President Bush Jr.'s later description of the same people as 'terrorists' classes them as heartless murders. The function of the first statement is to position them as allies. That of the second, to position them as foes. In this way language is used not to describe reality, but to construct it. The realist position states language describes events, beliefs and attitudes. To the contrary, discourse analysis states language constructs them.

### ***Variation***

Discourse varies according to the function of the language (Potter, Wetherell, Gill & Edwards, 1990). By examining variation, an analyst is able to identify the action orientation of any specific discourse. For example, by detailing the amount he worked,

a young father can position himself as driven to provide for his family or too enervated to play with his children. The distinct function of each discourse is identifiable by the manner in which the discourse is varied to suit its purpose. It is this variability that Gergen(1997) referred to when he described human self-concept as the labile. This is significant as humans fail to behave in a fashion coherent with their 'attitudes'.

***Generalizability/Relevance.***

Traditional social psychology sought to generate facts. Their status was supported by the sample size from which they were developed, and the unconfounded environment in which they were identified. The larger the sample size the more powerful the claim and the wider the area of application. A consequence of these prerequisites was that many issues proved too complex and intricate to be examined with quantitative means (Burman, 1996), for example, the experience of adolescent fatherhood. The areas of viable study were thereby limited. Discourse analysis does not seek legitimacy by claiming its findings are universally generalizable. Its claims are transparently partial, developed by examining the detail of a small number of texts within a local context. There are no pretensions to go beyond that population or context. Its value is in its ability to extract the semiotics operating within a limited number of texts, rather than skim across a raft of them (Parker 1994a). As textual meanings are never rigid, each discourse is open to multiple interpretations. The analysis invites the reader to consider an interpretation as one in a constellation of possible interpretations, not a snippet of objective truth. The success of an account rests on its ability to "*invite compel stimulate and delight*"(Gergen, 1985, p. 272) and not on a criterion of objective veracity. All descriptions are "*semiotically mediated*"(Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1995). The semiotics of that mediation is determined by the readers perspective. Quantitative psychology claims mediation is expunged by measurement (Kline, 1988). However the observed behavior is first delineated as indicative of specific 'mentalist' concepts. This attribution is none other than mediation. This positivist position of observation as staring through a one way mirror, ignores the interaction dyad between the starrer and the object (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### **Analysis**

Analysis begins with scouring of the text to identify systematic linguistic patterns within it. These may be patterns of similitude or dissimilitude. The second step is to identify the functional effects of specific patterns. This is all done whilst bearing in mind the construction, function and variability operating within the text. The primal feature of these three is variation (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Variation becomes prominent when differing accounts provided by a speaker for the same object are compared. This also highlights the manner in which the text is constructed to achieve differing accounts or ends. Comparing the differing discourses operative within the text also highlight the intra-text variability.

Primary in the analysis of text is the understanding that the researcher is central to the meaning made of a phenomena (Parker 1994b). The researcher casts their own position into the text, and must be ever mindful the degree to which they “*repair the indexicality*” (Garfinkel, cited in Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.168), that is, reshape the text in a manner which suits the reader’s ontology, not the author’s. Overall the examination is focused on the construction and function of the text, and variability is indicative of forms these take. The resulting analysis must offer a coherent explanation of the presented discourse. It must enlighten the reader as to the functional and constructional orientations of the text. The most demonstrative validity of the analysis is its ability to provide an original and convincing interpretation of discourse, indicating its function and explicating its construction (Potter & Wetherell).

### **Summary**

The popularity of discursive techniques can be attributed to the failure of positivistic epistemologies and methodologies to explain major issues of social psychology. Their ability to explore issues generally regarded as too complex for quantitative inquiry also adds enormous appeal. Being part of an overall shift to qualitative inquiry, discourse analysis provides a vehicle of social examination whose epistemological roots lie outside of a positivist paradigm. What follows is an account of the application of these techniques to the area of adolescent fatherhood.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter the practical measures taken to conduct this research will be explained. The initial task was locating and negotiating the participation of adolescent fathers. Given the sensitivity of the topic, issues of confidentiality and anonymity had to be resolved. Potential participants had to feel comfortable their contribution to this project would not be detrimental to themselves or their families. They needed also to be assured the researcher would deal with their personal accounts with sensitivity and respect. Some studies of adolescent fatherhood have used broad parameters of adolescence. This prompts the suggestion that such males are more young adults than adolescents, for example, Barret & Robinson, 1982: 16-21 years; Christmon, 1990: under 21 years of age. In this project, participation criteria were clarified to ensure only fatherhood amongst a narrow population was explored (upper age of 18 at time of becoming a father). Interviewing followed a post-structuralist approach (Burman, 1994) which assists circumventing the imposition of researcher prescribed categorization and construction. Coding and analysis followed the principles of discourse analysis as detailed by Potter and Wetherell (1987).

#### **Participant Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through two means. The first source was the local population. At the time of commencing the research I was a high school teacher at a co-ed state school in a rural province. The school's catchment drew heavily from a low SES section of the town and had a decile rating of 3. These characteristics are associated with high rates of adolescent fatherhood. I therefore was familiar with a number of students who became adolescent fathers whilst at school or soon after leaving it. Most participants were recruited from this population. I initiated this by first approaching relatives or close friends of potential participants. I discussed with them the possibility of them passing on to the adolescent father an invitation to participate in the research. I provided the relative or friend with information on the study (refer appendix A) to be included with the invitation. A week later I re-contacted the relative or friend to ascertain the adolescent father's response. If he was receptive to my invitation I made direct contact with him to discuss the possible time and location of an interview. I also answered any questions he might have on the project and posted him a Consent Form

for Participants (refer to appendix B) to consider at his leisure prior the interview. Were it relayed to me that he did not wish to participate in the study, I thanked the relative or friend of the adolescent father for their assistance and no further contact was made. Ten adolescent fathers were approached by this means, seven chose to participate. Having familiarity with so many participants proved a very useful tool. Burman describes this position as "*likely [to] facilitate greater disclosure and reflexive commentary*" (1994, p.66). Those participants familiar with the researcher completed interviews which were notably lengthier (mean 46 minutes) than those who were unknown (mean 28 minutes). They were also more likely to expand on issues which might be considered 'touchy', such as the appropriateness or inappropriateness of adolescent fatherhood and relationship difficulties.

The second means of recruiting participants was via the secondary schools guidance counselors' network. High school counselors within the confines of the Greater Regional Council were contacted by phone, and a detailed description of the research project given (refer appendix C, Background Information for School Counselors). A request was made for them to pass details regarding the study on to possible participants (refer appendix A). Twenty three secondary schools in the Greater Regional Council were canvassed, with a total population of about 16 800 students. The exact number of males considered as possible participants is unclear as schools were reluctant to give details regarding their roll. A reasonable estimate is between 8000-8500 males. From this population 11 adolescent fathers were referred. Three proved to be inaccessible, three declined, and five chose to participate. One of those five was already known to the researcher as he had attended his school several years prior.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given the sensitive nature of the research, the project had to be approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (P. N. Protocol 01/108). Specific ethical standards had to be reached to ensure adolescent fathers participating in this project could do so without detriment to themselves or their families. The following arrangements were made to ensure this they could do so.

***Informed consent.***

To maintain the ethical requirements of the Massey University Research Principles and those of the New Zealand Psychological Society, all participants were clearly informed that: (a) The information obtained from them would be used solely for the purpose of my research into the experience of adolescent fatherhood: (b) I would be the only person to have full access to the interview tapes: (c) My supervisor Dr. Keith Tuffin would peruse some of the coded/expunged transcripts for the purpose of providing me with analytical guidance: (d) My contact details were supplied so participants would be able to discuss the project with me should they wish to. Note within this research the term 'coded/expunged transcripts' refers to the process of, and actual transcription of, the interview with altered identities and features. This distinguishes the term from the latter term 'coding' which refers to a preliminary stage of data analysis.

***Anonymity and confidentiality.***

Interviews were transcribed by myself according to the conventions of Atkinson and Heritage (1984). All participants were issued code names for the purpose of the transcription as were all other people mentioned in the interview. Significant places and events were altered to ensure the participant's contribution remained absolutely anonymous. Occupations were also changed. To maintain sensitivity to the circumstances of the participant, details regarding the death of someone mentioned within the interview were not changed although their name was substituted. Four of the twelve participants discussed the death of a parent in the course of the interview. Once the tape had been transcribed each participant was sent a copy of their interview transcript and invited to make any changes they so wished. Only when they had communicated they were happy with their contribution, did analysis proceed.

**Legal Considerations**

As the law stands, consensual sexual relations with a female under the age of 16 years is illegal if the male is 16 years or older (Crimes Act 1961, Section 134). Given the subject material, it was probable that participants would disclose information which would make them liable for prosecution. Additionally several participants in the process of the interview discussed their involvement in issues such as consuming illegal drugs and

performing criminal acts. To ensure their contribution did not incur them risking prosecution, the following precautions were taken. 1: Code names and identities were allocated to all people detailed within the interview. 2: No personal details regarding the mother of the father's child were solicited. 3: Were the participant to volunteer information regarding the age of the mother of his child, this issue would not be explored.

### **Criterion for Participation**

There were three criterion for participation. The first was the male had become a father before turning 19 years of age. This would position him within the period of early adolescence (Newman & Newman, 1991). In this period most males have limited skills or resources with which to meet the duties of parenthood. Indicative of society's consideration of them as not fully mature, they would also be required to obtain parental consent to get married (Marriage Act, 1955, Section 18). The second criteria was that their partner had a live birth and the child was not deceased. This ensured their account of fatherhood focused on their experience of parenthood, not grief. The third criteria was that they were 20 years or younger at the time of the interview. This ensured their account of fatherhood in their adolescent years had the benefit of recency and some of the issues they had to negotiate during that period still had a degree of relevance. Having set these criterion, one needs be mindful of the wide variations within this period. Major differences occur not only during adolescence, but amongst participants of the same age.

### **The Participants**

Twelve adolescent fathers participated in this study. Below is a precis (with coded/expunged identities) of each participant.

Al, father of Josh aged two years. He was 19 at the time of the interview and was hoping to re-unite with Josh's mother. They had been together for two years prior the birth of their son.

Aged 19 at the time of the interview, Andy had a one year old daughter called Tatum. His relationship with her mother was terminated five months before Tatum was born.

Despite his wishes to develop a relationship with his daughter, he had only ever sighted the child once in a chance encounter.

Jed was the father of Ace, aged two years. He was 18 when she was born. His relationship with her mother broke down when Ace was about six months old. Ace stayed with him every second weekend. To accomplish this he traveled out of the province to see her.

Jesse was 17 at the time of the interview and had a three month old baby boy called Regan. He and Regan's mother lived with his own parents.

Jim was the father of Kyle aged three months. He was 16 at the time of the interview and lived with his partner in rented accommodation. He was employed full time.

Justin was aged 20 years at the time of the interview. He was the father of Tony who was three years old. After Tony was born he established a family unit with Tony's mother. This arrangement lasted 18 months before its breakdown. Tony lived with Justin three days a week.

Norton was 16 at the time of the interview. He had two children, Cale who was nearly two years of age and Tait who was seven months. Norton was living in a partnership with the mother of his two children but by his own admission this was a turbulent arrangement.

Paikia was 20 years old at the time of the interview and had a son Reg, who was born when he was 18. Paikia lived in a committed relationship with the mother of his child and they were expecting their second child in four months. They lived with his de-facto mother-in-law and extended family.

Paul was 18 years old at the time of the interview. His daughter Aggie was four months old. He and his partner had a committed relationship and lived with his parents. He had

resigned from his job at the time of Aggie's birth so he could spend as much time with her as possible.

Ric was 16 years old at the time of the interview and had a son John, aged five and a half months old. He had split up with the mother of his child prior the birth of his son. Despite wishing to develop a relationship with his son, his ex-partner conceded him with no access to him.

Sam became a father at 14 years of age. He was 19 at the time of the interview and lived with his daughter Rita and her mother in a committed relationship. He worked full time, and had changed his job to allow himself more family time.

Seth was 19 at the time of the interview. His oldest child was Nick who was born when he was 15 years old. His second child was Simon who was two years old. At the time of the interview he had been in a committed relationship with the mother of his children since he was 14 years old.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted at a time and location convenient for the participant. Ten of the 12 participants chose to be interviewed in their own home. Two chose to have the interview conducted in the researcher's office. Prior the interview participants were re-briefed as to the nature of the research project. They were read the 'Consent Form for Participants'(refer appendix B) and were invited to ask any questions regarding their contribution or the study in general. Once they were fully comfortable with making a contribution they signed the form. They also chose how the tape recording of their interview would be disposed of once it had been transcribed (refer appendix D, Options for the Disposal/Storage of audio-tapes). Interviews ranged from 18 minutes to 60 minutes. The medium length was 40 minutes, the mean 39 minutes. They were recorded on an Olympic Micro-recorder.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format (Burman, 1994)(refer appendix E) but were adjusted to suit the unique circumstances of each participant. Questions were broad

and designed more to invite and elicit participant comment, than retrieve specific data. The semi-structured format of the question schedule had two benefits. Principally it invited liberal dialogue on topics salient for the participant, while ensuring comment on specific issues were obtained from all. Secondly it avoided a major pitfall of unstructured interviews, that of being a "*dangerous misnomer for refusing to acknowledge prior expectations or agendas*" (Burman, p.50). Doing so takes a positivist position that an objective account is possible and no object-subject dyad is entered into. It is this hazard Garfinkel (cited in Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.168) alerts one to with his comment that the research must not attempt to "*repair the indexicality*" of the text. A semi-structured interview also provides an avenue to explore areas which might produce seemingly conflicting positions within an account. For example an adolescent father might detail that although becoming a father rescued him from a life of drunkenness and inertia, he would never recommend adolescent parenthood. This irony, not recommending a course which salvaged one's life, only emerges within an unconstrained text.

In the process of negotiating the participant's contribution to this research, and then making that contribution, specific care was given to avoid fostering "*power relations*" (Burman, p.51). The researcher remained acutely aware of his potential for taking a power position. This "*interpretive vigilance*" (Figueroa & Lopez, cited in Burman, p. 52) ensures that as much as possible the researcher and participant operate as a consultative and equal dyad. This was important as many participants required encouragement to explore issues they initially gave a cursory mention. Many participants seemed to avoid in-depth discussion by being desultory and only expanded on issues when a clear invitation to was made.

### **Transcription and Coding**

Audio-tapes of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher using a Sony BM77 Transcriber. All aspects of the interview were transcribed including the researcher's speech and comments made by other people present during the interview (in one case a friend, in another a partner). Attention was given to hesitations and pauses within the participant's dialogue but fine conversational detail was omitted. Transcriptions of the interviews were then coded. Preliminary coding discarded all material which had no

relevance to the topic. This was not a sizable amount of material as many of the participants engaged in limited small talk and none were sententious. The remaining text was then coded 'manually' (Tuffin & Howard, 2001). This necessitated 'close reading' of the text, which is a prerequisite for analysis. It also provides an opportunity to revisit the pre-established interpretations the researcher had about the data. It acts as a caveat against the pitfalls of over-interpretation and misinterpretation (Burman, 1994).

Data was then organized into distinct coding categories. These categories were formed to be over-inclusive of material (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This ensured elements of discourse were not omitted due to the researcher's preconceptions or misinterpretation of text. Through careful reading, the categories were allowed to emerge from the text. Portions of text were individually evaluated in relation to other text. This allowed distinct patterns to emerge from the data which delineated similitude. During this process nine categories emerged. Two of these were discarded and one was identified as a subset of another. Of the two which were discarded one proved to have very little coherence. The other had limited reference and due to length constraints had to be omitted. This discourse espoused the primary advantage of being a teenage father as being able to pursue sporting interests with one's child when they were in their teens.

### Analysis

Analysis followed a two step process (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Initially text was read to identify systematic themes, troupes, and resources the participants drew upon. Secondly the action orientation of the text was explicated. Variability acts as the most apparent indicator of function, so the researcher remained alert to textual variation. This is particularly salient when a speaker provides varying accounts of the same issue. Or differing speakers take differing positions on an issue. Variation also indicates the construction techniques speakers use, and how these techniques achieve select ends. Although qualitative research does not claim legitimacy based on an objective accounts of 'truth', the text was then re-read in context. This reduces the possibility of misinterpreting or over-reading the speakers account.

## **CHAPTER FOUR : DISCURSIVE RESOURCES OF ADOLESCENT FATHERS.**

Participants drew on six major discourses to construct their experience of adolescent fatherhood. Several of these discourses were preeminent with nearly all participants using them. These were the compromised discourse and responsibility discourse (both used by 11 participants) and the prematurity discourse (used by 10 participants). The improvement discourse was a little less common (used by 7 participants) but was conspicuous by the semiotic volume with which participants outlined it. Several of the discourses generated immediate and parallel comment from participants upon the researcher presenting eliciting probes. This acted to corroborate the contributions made by fellow participants. The compromised discourse, improvement discourse and responsibilities discourse were all salient in this regard. It also indicated the resources the participants drew upon were accessible to adolescent fathers in a range of circumstances. There are no distinct boundaries between the six discourses which have emerged from this analysis. They blend together like the warp and weft of a fabric, to compose the body of the text. Discourse analysis untwists eminent discursive strands from that text for the purpose of examining their construction and function.

Within this work the term 'nuclear family' is used to refer to a household structure entailing a father, mother and child or children. This is in contrast to a single parenthood arrangement. The function of the term is not to distinguish the family from an 'extended' family arrangement.

### **Prematurity Discourse**

This discourse was used by participants to construct the activity of fathering a child during one's adolescence as a premature undertaking. Participants used the discourse in three primary forms. The most common was prematurity incurring adult roles and duties for which adolescents are ill-equipped. The subsequent stress incurred can be the death blow to an adolescent relationship. The discourse was also used to construct adolescent fatherhood as lacking a reliable foundation. This sets the young family unit in a precarious position from its outset. Thirdly the discourse was used to depict adolescent

fatherhood as accelerating entry into adult roles and the subsequent omission of developmental stages.

This discourse was very common, most participants made a statement to the effect that doing parenthood during adolescence, is a far from ideal activity.

***Prematurity as stressing parental relationships.***

Jed's criticism of adolescent fatherhood springs from his concerns for his daughter. He constructs adolescence as an inopportune period in which one can identify a suitable life partner and endure the stresses of parenthood. The likely consequence of establishing a family unit during one's adolescence is eventual family breakdown. This is most damaging upon the child or children of the family.

*I would personally walk into a college I don't care if it's full of a thousand kids, I would be proud to say please don't do that to yourselves. Because the first thing is make sure you found the right person. Because I think the worst thing that will be for Ace is that she is gonna grow up in a split family, she won't have known because she was too young when we did split up. She don't know what her family is like together. And not only that too is that if you do find the right person, having a kid too young can normally stuff it up. Because there is just too much stress I mean when you're that young, you have got so much on your mind, more than, okay, more than okay how'm I gonna pay the mortgage at the end of the week or anything like that [ ]. You know and yeah on top of that is just getting the job and being able to support the family.*

*Jed.*

Above Jed draws on his experience to critique adolescent fatherhood. He constructs its two components, i.e., adolescence and fatherhood as incompatible. This is because of what he seems to state are their set tasks, although he does not detail these in depth. Those tasks will incur undue stress, this will bear upon the family unit and eventually rupture it. Jed's commitment to his daughter's welfare is evident in this remark. She is the one who will suffer on account of not growing up within an intact family. By making such a comment Jed is constructing nuclear family life as superior to separate parental

units. He makes no attempt to justify his position as a part-time single dad. He states clearly that position is second best to an intact family. Having a “*split*” family is the “*worst*” thing that could have happened to Jed’s daughter. This misfortune is compounded by her not even having memories of it to savour.

Using the phrase “*if you do find the right person*” Jed infers in a circuitous manner, finding the correct partner during adolescence is improbable. The entire process of commencing a family in one’s adolescence is therefore a gamble. Firstly one must identify the correct partner, then one runs the risk of adult responsibilities and roles attenuating the relationship. Jed suggests that although the couple may have the best intentions to remain together, parental and developmental (“*young*”) stress will debilitate the union. Even the option of ‘staying together for the kids’ becomes untenable.

Exactly what one has “*on your mind*” during non-parental adolescence is unclear. Jed reports it is more preoccupying than considering how one “*pay [s] the mortgage*”. He may be unknowingly referring to Ericksonian processes regarding identity formation, self-concept construction and ascertaining one’s role in life. The liberty of adolescence affords one with the opportunity to fathom these issues in preparation for adulthood. Given their non-specific nature they could arguably be seen as having a greater magnitude than concrete concerns such as bills and jobs. What Jed seems to imply is that adolescence should be given over to dealing with these other stresses, not struggling with parenthood and family life. His central reason for this recommendation, is to ensure the welfare of the child, that he or she may grow up within an intact family unit. This comment constructs the nuclear family with biological parents as the most favourable circumstances in which to raise children. His preparedness to publically state his folly “*walk into a college*” is typical of someone who has realized their lack of wisdom, and wishes to dissuade others from making similar mistakes. It aids the re-scripting of that mistake as a valuable tool from which others can learn.

### ***Prematurity as lacking a foundation***

Justin constructs parenthood as requiring a solid foundation. The essence of that rests upon financial security. He states given their recent entry into the workforce, adolescents

are poorly equipped to establish that foundation. In contrast he positions parenting skills as not age dependent so not requiring a “foundation” upon which to be established. They develop with exposure to children, and can be fostered at any developmental period.

*Basically we were too young, we didn't have a decent enough foundation[ ]. So in hindsight, I think we would have made the same decision, but, to keep Tony. But I wouldn't recommend it, if you have the choice. I do think it is too young to have a kid, ummmm, just in the way that you are doing without [ ] other things, pursuing what you want to do. And I really do think that you need a good financial base. That is probably the biggest aspect, yeah. At a younger age you are not earning that income that you would be a few years later. Ummm, I guess, at the moment a lot of people are waiting a lot older to have kids. I am quite happy to have a child at a younger age. I think I would have waited a couple of years given the choice, ummm but I don't regret it.[ ] Experience as a parent I think you just need to learn that as you go. That was never really a problem.*

*Justin*

Justin is clear that he does not regret having fathered a child as young as he did. Regretting this would transgress his attachment with his son. That child would become an ‘item of regret’. It would suggest he laments his son’s entry into his life and is grieved at having fathered him. Such a statement would position him as a reluctant father. Rather he regrets the circumstances surrounding his son’s entry into his life. That regret takes the form of “*not recommend [ing]*” having a child so young. Justin judiciously uses the two terms “regret” and “recommend” to finely position himself. He needs to preserve his self-construction as a dedicated adolescent father, but carefully articulate why being in such a position is undesirable.

The reason for Justin’s dissuasion is the ill-preparedness of an adolescent to support their child and family. This is his cardinal criticism of adolescent fatherhood. He uses two terms to describe the primacy of that position: “*foundation*” and “*base*”. Lacking these, a family unit is precariously ‘balanced’ and easily destabilized. The heart of that base is

financial security. This positions Justin as having a strong sense of parental and social responsibility. For him, it is the parent who should support the child, and it is that parent's duty to prepare for that event. He makes no reference to the state or welfare system making provision. It is the mother and father who must "*earn the income*" to provide that support. Justin gives other reasons to discourage adolescent parenthood. These relate to the limitation of one's freedom (*pursuing what you want to do*). But he makes a point of establishing these issues as secondary concerns. Doing so constructs his dissuasion as arising primarily out of his concern for his son's need to enter a family with a secure financial base. Not out of his self-centered concern at the limitations fatherhood placed upon his personal freedom.

Justin makes a comment on the dissimilarity between himself and another section of society who are "*waiting a lot older to have kids*". This does two things. Firstly by citing them, he makes it known that he is aware that there exists a general trend amongst part of the population to commence parenthood later in life. By doing so he offers a point of contrast between himself and that population. However, he is aware of that trend, and conscious that his circumstances are counter to it. The second function of this statement is to position Justin as disposed to parenthood "*at a younger age*". Whereas "*a lot of people*" are choosing to wait till they are older, Justin 'chooses' to have a child when young. His only mistake was to have had his child too young. This intent or active choice, detracts from any suggestion of irresponsibility. Having a child when young was a planned (responsible) activity, his only mistake was to have not "*waited a couple of years*". Even the nature of that mistake is recast as not "*being given the choice*". Because of his actions fatherhood was impressed upon him at 16 years of age. This text is carefully managed by Justin to diminish possible criticism regarding having an unplanned child while poorly positioned to support it.

Justin's final statement regards parenting skills per se. These, he states, develop intrinsically upon having children: "*you just need to learn that as you go*". They are not age-dependent and develop naturally with exposure. From Justin's position adolescents are no less capable of parenting than any older age group. It is only their social position, i.e., being poorly equipped to support their family, that ill-disposes them to parenthood.

In terms of being a father therefore, Justin has not been irresponsible as parenting skills are not age-dependent.

***Prematurity as skipping stages.***

Jesse constructs human development as comprising a series of stages which have a logical order. Each stage has developmentally appropriate activities. Fathering a child whilst in one's adolescence incurs accelerated transition into an advanced stage. This checks the liberty afforded by adolescence. Being a father in such a precocious period is possible, but it depends on the disposition of the person doing the fathering.

*Cause it, you could have a better life if you do go through all the stages. Specially when you get to that teenage age when you want to get out there and explore the world. But when you had a child like you can't do that. Everything just stops right there. You just jump straight to a man and now you have to[] just take care of your family. Yeah it could have been better if we, if I waited till I went through all the stages. But like ummm, yeah, it just, just ended up getting me in more, more crap than [] when I was [] all alone. Yeah. I would say there, there is nothing against starting a family at that young. It is all up to if they can take care of that family. Like there could be some that can't take care of that family. But like I'm the sort of one that makes the family come first. Yeah.*

*Jesse.*

At the outset Jesse constructs human development as comprising several stages. Each "stage" has 'age appropriate' behavior. Prior parenthood Jesse reports he was ensconced within his "teenage age". He constructs himself as particularly sensitive to the opportunities and liberties afforded by this period: "*Specially when you get to that teenage age you[] want to get out there and explore the world*". Jesse's choice of phrase does two things. Firstly his use of the word "you" serves to make the desire to "get out there" seem innate. It operates as a generalized term referring to 'us', 'all teenagers'. All teenagers wish to follow this course of action, i.e., "*explore the world*". It is the nature of teenagers per se, and part of that stage. The second function is to focus on the liberty afforded by adolescence. That liberty springs from no longer being constrained by one's

parents and being unencumbered by duties. He has a heightened awareness of these features given that they are no longer pertinent to his experience of being a teenager. Fatherhood has accelerated his entry into a stage discordant with his chronological position. Jesse describes that acceleration as swift and direct. The opportunities once available during one's "teenage" stage are negated instantly "everything just stops right there". The responsibilities of parenthood bear upon him ineluctably. Jesse constructs his developmental stage as pinned to his level of responsibility. Having a "family" to "take care of" positions Jesse as "a man". Using the terms "teenager" and "man" Jesse clearly constructs separate categories which not only distinguish, but define the duties/behaviors pertinent to that position.

He positions himself as a responsible father by stating his teenage years are terminated. He does not attempt to maintain or pursue the liberty teenage-hood offered. He is resigned to his obligations as a father. But he does state his route to fatherhood is not ideal. Entering parenthood in ones teens circumvents passage through specific "stages" which he implies have developmental benefits. Not only could things have been better Jesse states, but he would have had a "better life" had he passed through those stages. This global comment, prompts the question what is the function of those stages which were skipped. And why skipping them provokes having a life which could be "better". Jesse has already designated teenage years as affording one an opportunity to explore the world. An opportunity parenthood truncates. However, he may also be commenting on the facility those pre-parental stages provide to prepare for the responsibilities of fatherhood. Namely obtaining employment skills, acquiring material provisions and cementing a secure relationship with a partner. That he is referring to his failing to secure these issues/features, is indicated by the fact he refers to having fathered a child in his teenage years as "getting [him in] more crap". This negative term "crap" most likely refers to the arduousness of being a father when only seventeen. Although it is unspecific, it's general inference is that things can be unpleasant for Jesse as he endeavours to take care of his family.

Jesse constructs the ability to meet the duties of adolescent fatherhood as dependent on the capacity to take care of one's family. That is "make the family come first". Doing

so involves terminating one's teenage preoccupations and devoting oneself to fathering duties. This commitment requires skipping specific developmental "*stages*", and coping with the "*crap*" that will engender. Jesse positions his family as coming first, so he is prepared to deal with the "*crap*" to ensure their welfare. This position, of the male taking care of his family and enduring unpleasantness in the process, is a very traditional one. It acts to ratify his status as a father and provider/care-giver.

As he states, his position is not ideal and following a more sequential passage through developmental stages is preferable. However, for Jesse doing fatherhood in one's adolescence is possible providing one is prepared to skip stages of growth, and cope with the difficulties that provokes.

### *Summary*

This discourse articulated the position in which most adolescent fathers found themselves. They stated emphatically they held no regrets whatsoever as to having become a father. Doing so would transgress their relationship with their child. However, for several reasons none recommended fatherhood at such an early age. This discourse constructs those reasons as incurring undue stress on the young family, omitting developmental stages and failing to secure a base upon which to establish a family. With an insecure family foundation, the tragedy of the family's demise was most acutely felt by the children of the dis-union.

### **Agent for Growth Discourse**

This discourse constructs becoming a father as instrumental in provoking personal growth for the adolescent male. This growth is notable and many fathers would contrast themselves with their pre-parenthood nature to highlight it. Some would highlight the disparity between themselves and peers who had not become parents, as evidence of their own transformation. The central character of this discourse was that parenthood offered one an opportunity for personal development. This was unappreciable to those who were not parents. The discourse was used in three evident forms. Several participants used it to position themselves as 'activated' by parenthood. Becoming a father motivated the adolescent to harness their skills and talents. The discourse was also used to construct

them as duty bound to behave pro-socially. For other participants the discourse depicted the separation of pro-parental conduct and anti-parental conduct as unreconcilable behaviors.

***Growth as getting off your arse.***

Using the term “*get off my arse*” Jed constructs himself as delivered from a life of drunkenness and indolence to one of industry and self-application. The agent for this transformation is fatherhood.

*Na. Na. Cause I mean you know that, that's the whole. I mean I was lazy. I was lazy at school, I was lazy when I finished school and went on to the course. And I, it only took having bubs to really wake me up. You know and make me think okay, I've got to do something with my life otherwise yeah, my baby's not going to have a life so.[ ] If I hadn't been a dad I don't think I would have got off my arse, you know got the gumption to get out there and get a job and do all that thing and I knew when we first had her. You know she was the only reason that was really getting me off my arse. You know and I mean she's the only reason that gets me off my arse now.*

*Jed.*

Jed provides an account of his personal growth which he attributes to his need to provide for his daughter. The key feature of that account is his attribution. He attributes his daughter and his duties to her as a father as responsible for the transformation which “*got [him] off [his] arse*”. As meritorious as that transformation is, Jed uses a rhetorical formula to establish it. Doing so increases the credibility of his account and detracts from any issues of stake. Those issues of stake are that at 18 years of age he set about to “*get off his arse*”. Attributing that movement to the welfare of his daughter, positions Jed as less self-motivated than he might be. He constructs himself as transformed so as to take responsibility for his daughter's life, not to take responsibility for his own. It also gives him a reason to dissociate with an “[*un*]stable” peer group (refer below). Most poignantly however, it positions Jed as having a powerful sense of paternal duty. This constructs Jed as a dedicated father, and can be used to rebuff criticisms that in other

areas he may not be putting his daughter first. Such an area might be his time-consuming work commitments. If these are constructed as resulting from “*getting off [one’s] arse*” for the benefit of his daughter, then they cannot be construed as causing one to neglect one’s child.

Using the term “*have a life*” provokes a contrast between his daughter’s life with his support and her life without it. Factually of course, Jed’s claim is incorrect. His daughter will ‘have a life’ regardless of his actions. The “*life*” Jed refers to is a life of value and quality, where she will be supported and provided with all her requirements. Jed positions himself being singularly responsible for that provision. Why her mother does not feature in that is unclear. Possibly because it detracts from the clarion call Jed has received to ‘wake up’ and ‘provide life’ for his daughter. Her welfare lies in Jed’s hands alone, he must arise to provide for her.

The issue of credibility is addressed in several forms. At the outset Jed refers to himself in a derisory manner (“*I was lazy*”). Liberally reporting his faults functions to position him as reliably honest, as he is prepared to be openly self-critical. This implies his following account will also be honest and he has no self-interest in its construction other than reporting things ‘*as they were*’. Credibility is also developed by way of contrast. Below Jed details at length his pre-parenthood peers. He asserts were it not for parenthood he would still be of their ilk. The present contrast between himself and them begs an explanation, and the one Jed provides is his parenthood. That they remain unstable serves to corroborate Jed’s claim that he has “*got off [his] arse*”, unlike them who have not. The contrast also highlights the magnitude of Jed’s transformation.

*None of them are stable [old friends], none of them are stable in their minds or their jobs. None of them. Orrr I mean most of them now have just smoked too much drugs, drunk too much piss, and have just lost the plot. And I don’t think, a lot of them really have any get up and go to make it anywhere in life. You know I think they are quite content with ummm sitting on the benefit and getting wasted everyday.*

*Jed.*

He increases the disparity between himself and them by initially giving a blanket comment on them (“*none of them*”). This extreme case formulation (“*none*”) functions to impress that his’s ex-peer group is universally defective. By formulating his appraisal of them in such an extreme format, Jed makes refuting this accusation very difficult (Pomerantz, 1986). It is presented as a universal analysis of their nature. This term is repeated three times, the second time their instability is explicated (“*in their minds/jobs*”). This rhetorical sandwiching makes Jed’s claim more conclusive, i.e. “*they are unstable*” and this point cannot be disputed. He softens his next reference to seem reasonable (“*most of them*”) and uses a three part list (1): *smoked too much drugs*, (2): *drunk too much piss*, (3): *just lost the plot*, which has a powerful rhetorical effect (Atkinson, 1984). His account then takes a narrative shift. Jed ceases to critique his old peer group, and begins to explain them. He prefaces this explanation regarding them “*sitting on the benefit*” with “***I think they...***”. This move to cognition makes the comment seem well measured. It thereby appears an un-emotive remark, one which Jed has thought out. His overall point is that this peer group is “*unstable*” and “*wasted*”, and were it not for his having become a father, he would be the same. He makes this very statement elsewhere “*... to tell you the truth [if I had not have had Ace] I’d be the exact same way everyone else is.*”

Notable is the variation in Jed’s discussion. Above he explains his present position as being a direct result of being a parent. His uses the terms “*truth*” and “*exact*” to construct it as undeniable. Jed asserts the explanation for his momentous transformation (“*getting off [his] arse*”) is his daughter, this is irrefutable. However, later on Jed alludes to a shift within himself prior prospective parenthood.

*“I’d probably actually be blacked out by now you know too drunk to talk to you. That, that, I mean that the way I was heading and I mean well. In saying that I’d actually straightened out a bit after I’d gone to school too. Because I wanted to join the department of Conservation and do conservation work.”*

This softener “*I’d actually straightened out a bit*” makes Jed’s account more robust. Softeners function to stave off possible counter-claim(Edwards, 2000), here such a claim

would be that his account is embellished for rhetorical effect. The image he initially portrays of himself prior parenthood is one destined to alcoholism and abject idleness. Above he concedes he did begin to mature (*“straighten out”*) and set goals prior prospective parenthood. This qualification acts to temper the extreme self-forecast he initially made. It is ready to be expanded upon if the bleakness of his original forecast is probed. From the comfortable position of having *“got off his arse”* Jed is able to construct a self-forecast prior parenthood which is as extreme as his wishes. The more dire this account, the greater the precipitousness of his past life. Parenthood is therefore constructed as saving him just in time. The softener moderates against any possible interpretation of his claimed ‘transformation’.

The term Jed selects to describe his transformation is the idiomatic expression *“off my arse”*. This is a very robust term which constructs rather than describes Jed’s movement. Although he explicates it to a degree, the expression itself depicts him prior and post parenthood. It is an apt summary of Jed’s account of his ‘salvation’ from a life of alcoholic stupor. He was as one dead (lazy), he heard a clarion call awakening him to duty, (your daughter is in need) he rose from his stupor ([got] off his arse) a different man to rescue a child in need. His daughter’s birth is like a ‘Road to Damascus’ experience (Acts 9: King James Version), it unfolds before him truth and affects his self-transformation. Jed’s account might appear as him rising to give his child a life, but it could be read as his child giving him life.

***Growth as being on the straight and narrow.***

Sam depicts parenthood as keeping him on the *“straight and narrow”*. He details the prudence of this course and the benefit to his character. Like Jed above he uses comparisons with peers and his possible self, to illustrate the degree he has been redeemed/saved by fatherhood.

*Arrr yeah cause I see some of my friends now like, you know some of them are in jail, some of them are, some of them are actually, they have potential to do things. But now some of them are just yeah, they just had a bit too much to smoke I think. I would have been basically drug fucked if I wasn’t with Jane [my*

*partner] and that. [ ]Because at the same time Rita [my daughter], gave me a priority, to give it up and all that kind of stuff. Umm for me it's just made me grow up. You know. I am only 19 but I feel like I am 30, type thing. I do it just in my mentalness I feel like I am 30 because you know I, I'm, I've I'm telling someone what to do, I am teaching them something or, teaching my child something and ummm. It's made me stay on the , ummm, on the straight and narrow.[ ] I wouldn't recommend it to any parent because we did go through some hard times. You know I was getting bills and I was 16, 17 and all that kinda stuff. But it's made me see values like in money. It is not just something you use to pipe into yourself. It's used for to provide and all that kinda stuff.*

*Sam.*

Sam positions himself as having grown up by being kept on the “*straight and narrow*”. He uses contrast to highlight his position, and this has a specific structure. Sam describes a heterogenous group, that is, “*my [his] friends*”. He focuses on one section of them “*some*”. He then details their circumstances, “*in jail*” or having had “*too much to smoke*”. What Sam implies by reporting the state of these friends, is that were it not for parenthood he could have met the same fate. He then states emphatically that was his fate. By asserting that this was his destiny, the value of fatherhood is amplified, as it delivered him from incarceration and/or drug impairment. Sam could have equally mention others amongst “*my friends*”, those who were not part of that “*some*”, who were not drug damaged or imprisoned. Doing so, however, would have been pointless, it has no dramaturgical effect. Sam’s aim is to construct himself as precariously positioned prior parenthood, in grave danger of himself. Parenthood delivered him from this precipice, so he owes his very self to it. He can now recount this from the comfort of his nuclear family, no longer at risk of imprisonment or drug damage.

Sam exercises great civility when accounting the effects of drugs upon some of his old friends. His comment is reported as a cogitated analysis. He seems to attempt to diminish the effects and detract from their drug incapacitation, for example, “*they just had a bit too much to smoke I think*”. This contrasts with his self-reference were he to have continued his course of action without heeding his partner’s advice and attended to the

duties of parenthood “*I would have been basically drug fucked if I wasn’t with Jane.*” Sam uses such strong language in his self reference as it is the future he once faced that he describes. As it was his own drastic outlook, he is very sensitive to its implications. The term “*basically*” communicates this issue is clear and irrefutable. Sam is providing us with an honest and candid account of his teen life, and its prognosis had he maintained it. Using the term also fends off against counter claims: the issue he is describing is elementary, simple, that is, “*basic*”. Attempting to dispute it is to argue against simple logic. The term “*fucked*” impresses upon one the clarity of the issue. Unlike his friends who just had a “*bit [diminutive term] too much to smoke*”, Sam would have been “*fucked*”. Sam has a license to construct his future as so extreme as it was **his** possible outlook, and he is no longer in danger of meeting it.

The term “*straight and narrow*” is an apt description of the channel through which Sam would grow. It springs directly from a Christian discourse (Matthew 7: 13-14, King James Version) and carries with it a common knowledge regarding the consequences of righteous and unrighteous conduct. Being “*narrow*” implies strong limitations on his options and conduct. These limitations take several forms. Firstly, to meet the demands of being a parent he is duty bound to provide for his partner and daughter. He has not got the freedom his peers have. For one, the money he earns is not to be used for his own hedonism (“*pipe into yourself*”). It must be set aside to “*pay bills*” and to “*provide*”. He also has a restricted (“*narrow*”) range of activities he can pursue. Consuming drugs is not one of them as being “*drug fucked*” and doing fatherhood are incompatible. Being a “*straight and narrow*” channel, Sam’s passage down it is swift. The duties of providing for his family hurriedly remove him from his adolescent peers, whose preoccupations no longer entertain him. He has something else in his life which is his “*priority*”. He now spends his time engaged in behavior typical of males much older than himself, that is “*telling and teaching someone (his daughter) something*”. Sam seems to construct age as dependent on one’s role and activities, not one’s chronology. This is a common linguistic resource/practice, but usually occurs in the reverse form. For example adults in their twenties or thirties who remain engaged in irresponsible behavior can be constructed as “*still a kid*”. Sam self-refers as ‘*now an adult*’, because of his responsibility.

Sam's text has one major ironical feature. Despite the fact that parenthood delivered Sam from being "*drug fucked*" and wasting his potential, he does not recommend it. The reason for this dis-recommendation is the stress adolescent fatherhood had upon him. Being on the "*straight and narrow*" had an overall beneficial effect on Sam. But the salient feature he notes is the "*hard times*" he faced being 16 and a provider. Selecting this vague term to describe his experience implies more than it informs. Sam explicates part of it by detailing it was financial stress "*getting bills and I was 16*" but more is left unstated than stated. Particularly as Sam appends "*and all that kinda stuff*". That could refer to partnership problems, difficulties extracting himself from an indolent peer group, difficulties retaining work or physical exhaustion. His account suggests fatherhood is a beneficial experience, but there are more apposite times to embark upon it than in ones teens. Getting bills was not a problem, it was getting them at 16 years of age which was.

The below text details another form of growth Sam attributes directly to becoming a parent. This type of development featured in the dialogue of several participants.

*Orr yeah cause I seen it on the news [collapse of the twin towers], when I wasn't a father I used to just laugh at it, because, I don't know, stupid. But now I just sometimes feel like fucking crying for the little fucken bastards [suffering children]. Like all the stuff they are going through getting bombed like all where all the Yanks are doing all that huge bombing on them now in Afghanistan, and seeing them.*

*Sam.*

Again the growth is indicated by a contrast with his pre-parenthood attitude. Now that he is a father, the suffering of any child ("*little fucken bastards*") has an emotional effect upon him. The use of strong language ("*fucking*", "*bastards*") serves to indicate the depth of emotional arousal without constructing himself as insipid. At a societal level, Sam's parenthood has made him a more compassionate and loving man, and he is prepared to admit the pathos this stirs in him.

***Growth as separate categorization.***

Norton constructs fatherhood and gang membership as incompatible pursuits. This separate categorization of these two identities clarifies the choice he is duty bound to make. His desire to be aware of his children's welfare, dismisses any other lifestyle options.

*Kids, I, I can only say the kids [made me change], cause you know, the kids, who wants their fucken old man in jail? Where you can't see him and you only visit him 'see you dad', can't even touch him sort of thing. Orr I thought about all that. Got offered the bad life, like gang life and all that. But no. Sometimes I think about that, like gang life and all that. And I think, what if I did take it, I wouldn't have these kids and all this pressure that I've got now. Makes me think back, orrr fuck off, I should of, I should of, cause that suited me more. In a way. Orrr it is hard to explain, fuck I don't know aye. It's just hard, having kids is fucking.... Yeah. They are not gonna fade away. They gonna be there here, longer than me. So I gotta treat them, treat them precious I s'pose. [ ] just like, orr, knowing they are safe and stuff. Knowing they are safe and no one can hurt them. And they trust me with their lives and that.*

*Norton.*

Above Norton establishes two distinct categories, family life and gang life. He positions them as incompatible and distinctly at odds with each other. Norton's growth is detailed as him constructing these two positions as unreconcilable. He then selects the one most advantageous for his children. His disunion of these two positions is not a fixed separation. It is his own compartmentalization. Nothing proscribes these two lifestyles being irreconcilable. However, in Norton's discourse they belong to different categories. He constructs "gang life" as injurious to his children, and as he wants to know "no one can hurt them", not even himself, it is not an option. The agents which disposed Norton to make the choice he did are his children. That change, or selection of "family" category, is described as being exercised upon him as an external experience. Norton reports that his "kids" changed him. He was acted upon by them. He omits inclusion of his own intent. Change is done to Norton, he doesn't choose to change. In contrast to

Sam, his children are exclusively responsible for his change, his partner has no party to it.

The term "*gang life and all that*" is a clear example of systematic vagueness. Upon inquiry Norton can confirm or deny he meant certain specifics. In general what it does imply is violence, crime, alcohol and drug abuse, prison and infamy. Norton reports he was "*offered*" such a life ("*the bad life*"). The term "*offer*" implies Norton qualified for membership of an organization which generally had rigorous entry requirements. His 'direct entry' constructs him as having major anti-social inclinations, particularly as he would have been younger than 16 years at the time. His choice to decline that offer, positions him as sensitive to the needs of his children. Particularly their need to have an accessible father.

Similar to Sam and Jed, Norton takes an extreme position as the only alternative to fatherhood. He could have sited himself at any point on a spectrum of anti-social behavior. Instead he reports it's most outer limit: imprisonment and gang membership. Unlike Sam and Jed who report the detriment of their alternative to parenting as injurious to themselves ("*blacked out*", "*drug fucked*"), Norton reports it as injurious to his children. His active voicing of them stoically bidding farewell at the end of a prison visit, illustrates the practical implications of being incarcerated. He would be unavailable for his children. His comment that they would be unable to "*see*" their father, constructs "*see [ing]*" as more than viewing. They could view him during visits such as the one Norton narrates. Seeing involves having free access to, witnessing him, having him always about. Norton wants to know his children are "*safe*". That is not possible from prison.

A corollary of taking the "*gang life*" is reported as not having "*these kids and all this pressure that I've got now*". Norton would have remained a father were he to have taken up the offer of gang membership. But being a gang member is constructed as annulling his role as a father. It is not a matter of custody he comments upon, but one of responsibility. Norton constructs gang membership as obviating active fatherhood. It also dispels any responsibilities which might incur "*pressure*". In essence the choice Norton

faces/faced is fatherhood or non-fatherhood. His reflection upon the selection he made is worded as historical musing, *“sometimes I think about that, like gang life and all that. And I think, what if I did take it”*. He is not drawn to gang life. Rather, he is pushed toward it on account of the *“hard [ship]”* of parenthood. However, he describes it as an opportunity missed, he *“should of”*, but that opening is passed. The change Norton made is therefore indelible. This form of lament is a strong feature within his text. This contrasts with Sam and Jed. In hindsight they view their pre-parenthood lifestyle as nefarious. Norton still pines for those lost opportunities, but only as an alternative to the weighty pressures of parenthood. In Norton’s discourse, *“gang life”* and fatherhood are separate paths/categories. He makes no attempt to blend the two as this would be detrimental to his children. Although he laments his lost opportunities, he displays a deep sensitivity to the welfare of his children. It was those children who bore upon him to change.

Below Norton comments on a more global development he attributes to having children.

*I got more love now for everyone aye. My friends, my missus, my friend’s missus, my mum my dad, her [partner’s] mum and dad. I got more love for everyone than hate. Like I ummm. I don’t fucken look at them and think ‘you cunt’. I don’t think they are arseholes. I rather have a good time with them and stuff. Not being arseholes.*

*Norton.*

Norton reflects upon his pre-parenthood behavior. He displays a knowledge of how he would have once conducted himself *“I don’t fucken look at them and think ‘you cunt’*.” He also states exactly why he conducts himself with more civility, *“I got more love now for everyone aye”*. The most salient feature of this quote is that a 16 year old, who once considered an invitation to join a street gang, is now able to discuss love as unreservedly and liberally as he does. *“Having love”* is used to indicate a transition Norton has made. The bitterness he once experienced seems unreasonable and unnecessary. He now views his community with good will (*“I rather have a good time with them”*). As arduous as adolescent fatherhood may be for Norton, he admits freely

it has been beneficial to him. At a wider level, it has also been beneficial to the community in which he lives

### ***Summary.***

Using this discourse, participants were clear about the dramatic positive changes parenthood had effected upon them. Their importance as a parent functioned to give them a sensitivity to their **own** importance. Preserving this was therefore essential. The discourse operated in three forms, depicting self-motivation, the discarding of detrimental behaviors and making a choice to remain available for one's children, as resulting from fatherly commitment. The three forms were closely related, they all positioned the adolescent as transformed by their status as a father.

### **The Compromised Discourse**

This discourse established the adolescent father as compromised by specific factors or circumstances. Being compromised was constructed as having the discourse of fatherhood undermined or attenuated. Despite this, fathers would position themselves as dutiful and dedicated to their role as a parent. This discourse operated in four forms. At a wider level it constructed adolescent fathers as dispensable family figures open to scorn due to their lack of responsibility. At another level it positioned their status as a father as nugatory. The discourse was also used to construct the challenges facing an adolescent father as debilitating. The discourse was used specifically to construct the injustice, unfairness, insensitivity and inordinate duties facing adolescent males embarking on parenthood.

### ***Being compromised by being used.***

Fatherhood was constructed as compromised where one was used specifically to father a child. Several participants reported themselves being enticed into a relationship with the unstated aim of conceiving a child. Upon pregnancy the relationship would be terminated and the male discarded. This discourse had a strong sense of injustice and was associated with the male's powerlessness in the situation. The most graphic account of this nature was provided by Andy.

*I was told [that my ex-partner had given birth to my baby] by Shazza [a workmate] and that sort of gutted me cause I thought they'd at least have the decency to least tell me that she had been in labour. Or just had the baby, so I could maybe go see it or something. Yeah, really slutted me. Yeah and nothing happens, like no one gives a fuck. Yeah..... set me up for a fall and then, felt like I was used. Cause apparently she did want a baby before she even met me, always wanted one....Or it's, nyooorr, it's not hard, it's just hard on my emotionally I guess. It's like; yeah, like every, every time I think about her, yeah like I want you know, I pull enough guts, and when I go to the phone it's like, orr no. I can't, it's too hard, gonna try though, sometime..... I've never seen her, only in photos.[] think about her..]all the time, it's like everyday, gradually, crosses my mind. The fact that mum was a grandma, she's a real sweet lady, .....she was quite sad in the end.*

*Andy*

Andy positions himself as having been used by his ex-partner to father a child. He commences with an account of her and her family failing to inform him of her having entered labour and given birth. This serves to support his position that having been used, he is no longer important in the child's life, and needs not be notified of her arrival. Stating a desire to be informed of the birth constructs him as a concerned or at least interested father. Stating a desire to be informed of the labour constructs him as even more concerned. This position establishes him as wishing to be briefed as his baby and its mother enter a critical period. His opportunity to *do fatherhood* once the baby is born, is compromised by being left uninformed of having become a father at all. His reference to visiting his child is amorphous, "*maybe go see it or something*". It suggests an uncertainty Andy might have regarding his role as a father. It could also allude to his having to negotiate access to his child, with a family he perceives as discouraging contact. Under the circumstances, he may even need to negotiate just getting basic information on his child. Notably he does not refer to "*her*" or "*my daughter*" but "*it*". Presently his child is an object, an entity he does not know. She is an "*it*", an unknown and unclear phenomenon. In his account of being a father Andy's discourse lacks real

security. For him, his ex-partner's machinations have excluded him from parenting, so he has little sense of being a parent.

To Andy, being informed of the birth despite his separation from the child's mother, is decent behavior. It is a statement of his importance as that child's father. The duty to be decent (inform him) rests not solely on the mother of his child, but her family also ("*they'd at least*"). Using the extreme reference "*at least*", it positions it as a fundamental consideration. Her family has behaved indecently by failing to perform this fundamental act. For Andy this is indicative of him having been used. This allegation is corroborated by his statement "*apparently*". This functions to inform the reader that 'someone' had informed Andy of this. This corroborates his position, it was not solely his assessment. His ex-partner wanted a baby; she conceived one with him. Once that was accomplished, he was discarded. Like any item which has ceased to be of use, he can be treated without decency.

Having been used, Andy is excluded from parenting his child. He positions himself with little hope of righting this injustice. Firstly it is not just his ex-partner he must confront to obtain his right to parent. It is her family also. "*They*" also failed to be decent and inform him. He has been expunged from his ex-partner's life, and from the life of his child's maternal grandparents. Secondly, Andy constructs no one as caring about his exclusion. "*Nobody gives a fuck*" that he has been used and is prohibited from being a dad. The "*nobody*" has a wide reference. On a personal level it can mean family members and peers. Andy is unable to turn to them for support as no one has any sympathy for an excluded father. On a societal level, he is unable to call upon civil agencies for assistance establishing himself as a father, as none care. He is left powerless as a father. Andy's sense of powerlessness is manifest in his account of attempting to make contact with his daughter. The task of negotiating with his daughter's family is "*too hard*" and disables him. He compounds the detriment of his exclusion stating it was not solely he that was grieved by his being used. His mother was also. She "*was a grandmother*" only in name however, as she was unable to meet and bond with her granddaughter. This was because Andy had not been selected as a partner and father. He had been used as a sperm donor. Andy's account has a strong sense of grieving

within it. This positions him as a concerned parent despite his omission from fathering. It acts to counter any suggestion that he might be an irresponsible male, on account of fathering a child he has never seen. He attempts to detail his grief with the term “*hard on my emotionally.*” Like someone in grief, he often thinks about the one he has lost and their absence has an emotional toll. That grief as a parent is compounded by having been prohibited from establishing a relationship with his daughter.

This discourse, compromise as being used, positioned Andy as having been exploited by his child’s mother. He displays a wish to be involved in the child’s life but is prohibited. He constructs himself as a reasonable man, affected emotionally by his loss. The discourse functioned specifically well to position the male as the victim of an injustice.

***Being compromised by strains.***

Fatherhood was constructed as compromised in circumstances where a participant found meeting the demands of being a young father, partner and breadwinner very straining. These strains compromised the quality of his family life, and reduced the amount of time and energy he was able to spend with his partner and child. Justin details his experience of taking on these three roles simultaneously and the strains it had on his family. The end result of doing so was the breakdown of the relationship with his partner, and him repositioning himself as a father.

*Umm we flatted [once our son was three months old] for probably about a year together. Flating was hard, having basically a single income, low income[.]. It put a lot of strains on things. [] [I] was, trying to earn as much money as I could[.]. Ummmm, I think, that led me to be slightly naive to other needs for the mother. And I think she wanted to be doing more than just looking after Tony. And from there things sort of went down hill a bit until we broke up about a year ago. Ummmm, you just tend to lose a bit of your energy I guess. Every week it is trying to decide [], what bills you are going to try and pay. And that I guess, you don’t have money to enjoy yourself. I wouldn’t say I wasn’t spending enough time with Tyler, arrr, but I saw the main important thing, priority at the time was earning money. Which, which was the important thing at the time. But*

*now you, that's not nearly as important. It is more creating the time to be able to take care of him. Cause I don't go home to him, he only comes around in the weekends. So it is different from normal.*

*Justin*

Justin constructs himself as having been “*strain[ed]*” as he attempted to negotiate the positions of father, provider and partner. The position, of being “*strain[ed]*” is used to abate responsibility for the consequences of his course of action. A key feature of Justin’s account is his management of issues of responsibility surrounding the breakup of his family. At the outset Justin details the impoverished position in which he and his young family found themselves. Unable to clear all their expenses, or to “*enjoy your [them]selves*”, Justin devotes himself to “*earn as much money as I [he] could*” to remedy the situation. By initially accounting such a dire financial position, Justin constructs his chosen course of action as the most logical solution available. The “*strain*”[s] his action incurred are therefore an unavoidable consequence of a commendable attempt to remedy his family’s poverty. Justin has employed a clear rhetorical technique to construct his family’s “*strains*” as an inevitable consequence of having to be responsible. He does this by selectively detailing his family’s “*strains*” from a purely financial perspective. He could have conversely detailed relationship strains, or the strains of being new parents (common to all parents regardless of their age). His selectivity constructs his course of remedy as absolutely reasonable, and responsible. This mitigates Justin’s part responsibility for the eventual breakup of his family unit.

The major strain he cited was his failure to consider the “*other needs for the mother.*” Exactly what this means is vague. Justin’s only explication is to say she wanted to do more than just be a mother. His wording infers that her primary needs ‘were’ considered. It was her “*other*” needs, her secondary needs, that were neglected. It is left to the reader to infer what those needs were. His failure to consider her needs is ascribed to his being “*naive*”. This implies inexperience, simplicity and shortsightedness, it detracts from his agency and positions him as meaning well, despite the consequence. He manages his concession of naivete by using a suggestive/reflective form “*I think [I was]*

*naive*", rather than a definite/concrete form "*I was... naive*". His use of the diminutive "*slightly*" moderates the naivety he displayed at the time, it mitigates responsibility.

Justin uses a narrative format to recount his early life as a father, partner and breadwinner. This format gives the impression of being a full and conclusive coverage of the events detailed. It takes a storyline form; moving in together; providing for the family; being strained; going downhill; breaking up. Within this format Justin is able to fuse his account with attribution. He "*neglected*" his partner because he was "*strained*"; things went "*downhill*" because he had "*lost energy*". The reader obtains an impression of having a full account of his family life. Such a presentation staves off counter positions, or contrary descriptions of Justin's action. He could have equally accounted his embarkation of fatherhood from the perspective of the struggle to bond with his son. This would note not his spending long hours at work, but trying to expand on the hours he spent at home. The account would chronicle him making time for work, not time for Tony.

In the later part of the text Justin details his performance as a father whilst things were "*strain[ed]*". He prefers not to concede that he did not spend enough time with his son "*I wouldn't say I wasn't*" but he acknowledges spending time with him was not the main priority. Earning money was. This rhetorical technique of hedging, disagreeing with a possible accusation (you were not spending enough time with your son) but qualifying your actual position (I couldn't spend much time with him I had to earn money) preserves Justin as a responsible parent. His response maintains his investment in his self construction as a committed father, despite the fact time with his son may have been compromised. In a form he states, 'in lieu of spending time with my son, I was earning money so we could survive, time was strained'. Justin constructs his fathering as a hapless victim of his financial strains. At the end of his account Justin details repositioning himself as a parent. Making money is no longer the most "*important thing*", it is now "*creating time*" to be with his son. This change of priorities is attributed to "*not coming home to*" his son. It implies that living with his son constituted a form of contact, despite not prioritizing him at the time. It served as a form of

fathering. But once Justin is no longer strained, he is able to set his son as the paramount priority.

The taxing strain of being a breadwinner with two dependents at such an early age can prove fatal to an adolescent relationship. In Justin's account it also had a detrimental effect upon the quantity of time he spent with his son. Justin's narrative attempts to defend the position he took to provide for his young family, despite the fact that in doing so the family unit was severed.

### *Being compromised by social opprobrium*

This discourse established adolescent fatherhood as compromised by social opprobrium. Participants constructed themselves as specific targets for rebuke on account of their youthful parenthood. A critical feature of this discourse was attribution. An older or more conservative generation was constructed as scornful of adolescent fatherhood without grounds.

*And I've had a few arguments with people in other towns they have looked at me strangely, being the age I am pushing a pram around. Cause I was in Upper Hutt probably would of been a good six months ago with one of my ex-girlfriends or girlfriend at the time. Walking up town I had my son with me in the pram, and some old lady was like 'Orr you male skank' or something and I was like 'hey lady, I was with the mother of this child for over two years before he was born and it was just something that happened and I'm proud of it. So in other words keep your remarks to yourself cause I don't want to hear them'. Well usually they [old people] look at teen fathers as male whores and bits and pieces.*

*Al.*

The central business Al's account attends to is attribution. His introduction is rich in contextual details: where he was "Upper Hutt"; when "about six months ago"; with whom "an ex-girlfriend"; what he was doing "walking up the street pushing a pram". This vivid description ties his experience of opprobrium down and gives it greater

credibility and rhetorical force. It indicates Al can cite specific examples of being rebuked. Starting with a factual base also gives the impression that this is a detailed account of the event and as such, all relevant details will be provided. There is a myriad of details/facts Al could supply, in this case he selects those which support his experience, that is, an older generation is scornful of adolescent fathers.

Al provides a specific activity sequence in which he details the opprobrium he encountered. He was innocently *“walking up town”* and while doing so hailed by *“some old lady”*. The adjective *“some”* accentuates that she was unknown to him. Being unknown, she is unaware of his experience or commitment as a father, and unqualified to comment on them. Additionally it positions Al as going about his lawful business. It is the *“old lady”* who assails him with an unprovoked insult. Exactly what she called him is unclear, it could have been *“skank”* but Al is unemphatic about this. This vagueness allows Al to make his next conclusion, that whatever she called out was an abusive term directed at him on account of him being an adolescent father. And being an adolescent father was indicative of having lax sexual morals. Al’s refutation of the *“old lady’s”* imputation of lax morals centres around the issue of commitment. He seems to concede to her that the child’s conception was adventitious *“just something that happened”*. The real issue for Al, however, was the length of time he spent with the child’s mother prior it’s birth, in this case *“two years”*. He puts it to her that to be in a committed relationship for two years is indicative of sexual propriety, and as such he is not a *“skank”*. Al infers he is a dedicated father with his statement *“I’m proud of him”*. His son being unplanned and he being poorly prepared for fatherhood do not detract at all from his feeling for his son. It is pride he feels, not shame. Being a father was not about doing age appropriate behavior, but about being proud of your children. Exactly what that means is unclear. Specifically Al used the term several times within his account of being an adolescent father. Without wishing to read too much into the text, the author proposes that Al used the term to indicate the strong emotional bond he had with his child. It could be considered synonymous with the statement *“I love my son”* but avoiding an overt display of sentiment.

He prefaces his encounter in Upper Hutt with a comment that he has had a number of altercations “*a few arguments,*” with not just one person but with several “*people,*” and this has happened in a number of places “*other towns.*” He then goes on to detail one such encounter. At the conclusion of that Al presents a general rule, an older generation views adolescent fathers scornfully. This formula, reporting a frequent occurrence, giving a specific example and generating a universal rule: gives credence to Al’s attribution that old people disapprove of adolescent fatherhood. It dispels any notion that Al is reporting a groundless impression he has.

Al’s account is presented as a factual record of an encounter which to him is representative of the opprobrium of an older generation. He rebuffs this unwarranted scorn with reference to his commitment as a parent and his past commitment to his son’s mother. The social opprobrium is therefore unjustified and irresponsible. For Al, fathering is about being “*proud of your son [child]*”, and one can be at any age.

***Being compromised by a lack of respect from peers.***

Adolescent fatherhood was reported as compromised by a lack of peer respect. Those peers were reported as failing to acknowledge and accept the new responsibilities their friend had. Or they did not concede that he had made an irrevocable transition, and was no longer the unfettered youth with whom they once socialized.

*And you know, [a man] has friends that respect him and his family, like, for me, cause the hardest thing is that ummmm my friends don’t realize that, if they want to like be my friends, like me, they gotta like my family. You know, they don’t realize that. They just come round and see me not my family or my missus or nothing. They don’t interact with us. It’s just they come to see me. I have about fucking five six cunts come everyday. Different people to come and see me, and they’re not here to see my family they are here to see me. They piss me off in a way, the things they do. It’s like they got no respect, knowing that I’m a father and all that. Pisses me off cause they don’t really worry about it aye. They think I am still young Norton, out and about.*

*Norton.*

Norton's account describes a conflict between identities. The first identity he details is the one he has of himself, a man. And a man has friends which respect him. His focus on not getting respect from friends acts as a lament that he has taken on the role of a man, but is not acknowledged ("*respect[ed]*") for it by his peers. Despite being 16, Norton seems to consider himself as a "*man*" as opposed to a youth or adolescent. His grounds for this rest upon him having assumed the responsibilities he has as a father and partner. It seems in Norton's construction developmental status is determined by one's role and responsibilities, not one's age. His account indicates that his family is not just a sideline, it is an integral part of his identity. To "*like*" Norton one must "*like my [his] family*". Doing otherwise attenuates his role as a father and partner. The degree to which his role as a father and partner is amalgamated within his own identity is encapsulated within the following "*they don't interact with us. It's just they come to see me*". Norton's identity is now "*us*", him and his partner and their two children. Interacting solely with Norton acts to expunge him from that four part unit. "*Me*" is only a portion of his identity. Becoming a father and attempting to commit himself as a partner has transformed Norton from a boy to a man.

The second identity noted is that of "*young Norton, out and about*". This is the character his peers attempt to extract or resurrect from the new Norton, the family man. Exactly what "*out and about*" means is unclear but it alludes to him being unfettered and able to go to parties, the pub and socialize unhindered. Norton makes two references to their thinking. The initial one is that they do not "*realize*" he has made a transition. The second reference states they do not "*worry*" about it. Not "*realize[ing]*" positions them as ignorant and therefore less culpable. Not "*worry[ing]*" they are downright disrespectful. This rhetorical technique, to begin an account mildly, and then increase it's intensity, constructs Norton's comments as well measured. Being so, they are more convincing.

The conflict between the two identities occurs when his peers attempt to extricate the "*young Norton out and about*" from the Norton who considers himself a family man. This undermines that identity and generates stress for Norton "*it pisses me off*". Identity occurs on a number of levels, and on a personal level Norton has transformed his to

become a father and partner. At a community/peer level he encounters conflict, as this personal identity is debilitated. Norton's account indicates *doing fatherhood* is something one does as part of a community, it is an identity one's community must support. Failing to support it compromises his role as a father. One should not conclude from his choice of appellation for those peers who failed to acknowledge his transition, "cunts", that he felt deep enmity towards them. It was used as a general term to refer to any male. The author himself was introduced to Norton's father as a "cunt who's here to talk about being a dad". His father then gave the author a can of beer as a sign of hospitality.

### *Variability*

Despite the vexation Norton details at having his new identity unacknowledged by his peers and thereby compromised, he admits he can succumb to this peer pressure. His below account narrates the sequence of events which surround him 'going out'.

*I don't really think about them [my kids] at that time cause you know every cunt is going 'come on Norton, lets go lets go'. And the missus is going 'no, no' and you know it's a lot of fucken 'oh what shall I do what shall I do?'. Yeah and it's just...honestly I normally take off aye. You feel like the biggest cunt in the world (when you get home) You feel like a big dickhead. Yeah that's about, orr I can't say really, hard to say. You want to but you can't but you do. Yeah, the little boy in me just says ' orrr fuck it just go'.*

Norton concedes he is negligent in that he fails to consider his children. He also admits he feels terrible about it afterward. He attributes his preparedness to "go out" to being controlled by "the little boy" inside him. He uses this dichotomy of a greater Norton (adult man, responsible father) and lesser Norton (little boy, irresponsible youth) as a tool by which his behavior is explained.

The transition from an unfettered youth to a dedicated father and partner is compromised by peers who fail to acknowledge this transition. At times, as detailed by the first quote, peer pressure can actively undermine the new status. From the second quote one can

conclude the less affixed that new identity, the more vulnerable to peer compromise it is.

### ***Summary***

This discourse was able to operate at several levels. At a macro level it sited the adolescent's position within society (social opprobrium discourse). At a middle level it sited that position within a family or peer arena (being used discourse and lack of respect from peers). At a micro level it positioned compromise as a personal encounter (strains discourse). Participants displayed a sensitivity to their agency in positioning themselves in such a vulnerable situation. That is being young, poorly equipped for parenthood and taxed in meeting its demands. This was accentuated by a lack of societal support and the diffuse nature of their identity. Overall the discourse positioned the young father as encountering debilitating obstacles as he set about to parent his child.

## **Dual Identities Discourse**

Participants drew on this discourse to position themselves as caught between two disparate identities, which at times could prove to be in conflict. Those identities were that of an adolescent and that of someone with the adult responsibilities of fatherhood. The discourse could be used to explain the stress experienced, as participants attempted to reconcile themselves to these two identities. It could also be used to account the development of the fatherhood identity itself. The linguistic resources participants drew upon to construct this discourse were readily identifiable, for example, "*manhood*", "*childhood*", "*adult*", "*kid*", "*father*", and "*young*".

### ***Dual identities as staying a kid***

Below Sam provides an account of his attempts to remain "*still a kid*" despite having become a father at 14. The impetus for his passage from "*a kid*" to "*a father*" is provided by his partner. Although Sam does not explicate exactly what a father is or does, it is more by describing the behavior of its antithesis (being "*a kid*") that he outlines it. He details the two identities he possessed, that of a father and that of a kid, and suggests their incompatibility in his final statement.

*I tried staying in school but I think I was just staying in school to just to, orr I reckon, let myself know I was still a kid, sort of thing. I was just still young. But yeah like I was saying before I always knew I was a father in the back of my head. All my friends knew. I sort of got touchy when friends and that would bring it up. Ummm, yeah, just because that wasn't what I really wanted to think about at the time. Yeah. Cause I was at school, I just wanted to arrr, to be, to be a kid, yeah. I didn't mind it at first but after a while I was only 14 when she got pregnant. Ummm, and I still had a lot of things I was still doing like I was still normal things hanging out with friends all that kind of business. I was, I think I was in the band at that time as well. That took a lot of my time and, she knew I liked doing it but I think a lot of arguments stemmed form me being with my mates. I think we argued more though. It was about basically cause I wanted to go and hang out for a bit with my mates, she didn't like it, she didn't like me ummm. She, she didn't like me drinking orrr, stuff like that. Yeah, basically it was mainly about me being in, I was a bit of an arse-hole there.*

*Sam.*

His initial reference to himself as a “*kid*” could seem unflattering when applied to a 14 year old with a notable amount of independence. It has connotations of being an unfettered child who is provided for. Sam’s use of this self-reference functions to concentrate his identity as someone who was clearly not an adult, despite his responsibilities. By attempting to retain his identity as a “*kid*”, he staves of the looming duties of fatherhood. His account of the process by which he does so constructs him as a father attempting to remember he is only 14, not a 14 year old trying to remember he is a father (“*let myself know I was still a kid*”). The overbearing nature of that “*father*” identity is clear. Sam censures himself for failing to conduct himself as a dutiful father. He does not censure himself for forfeiting the freedom of adolescence. In hindsight for Sam, being a “*kid*” also denotes his pastimes as “*kids*” stuff, when compared with the duties of fatherhood.

The narrative Sam provides focuses on his activities as a kid, and concludes that to have preserved that “*kid*” identity constituted being “*an arsehole*”. His description of his

*“kid”* like activity is unremarkable, *“hang[ing] out with mates”*, *“being in the band”* and *“drinking”*. Amongst his peer group this was *“normal”* behavior. At a wider level there is nothing anti-social or deleterious about such activity. However, when he takes up the position of a father, that *“kid”* like behavior becomes inappropriate. It is that which positioned Sam as an *“arsehole”*. He concedes having himself be positioned as a father, is something he preferred not to do at times, *“I sort of got touchy when friends and that would bring it up [ ] that wasn’t what I really wanted to think about at the time”*. Retaining his identity or position as a *“kid”* gives Sam license to pursue adolescent interests without incurring dissonance. His statement *“I didn’t mind it at first but after a while”* suggests a transition in his thoughts about being a father. He possibly learnt that being a father, and doing fatherhood, are not the same things.

The account Sam provides has a particular focus. That is, his preoccupation with *“kid”* like activities in the early period of having a daughter. That focus diverts attention from other possible focal points, for example the issue of Sam’s performance as a father. What is notably missing in his account is mention of his daughter. Sam is unreserved in admitting that attempting to maintain his *“kid”* identity was reprehensible. He does this with the term *“arsehole”*. However, his narration focuses on his reluctance to abandon the pursuits of a kid. It does not consider his neglect of his paternal duties. An account of that issue would be very damning of Sam’s initial period of parenthood. A period when he chose to *“hang with mates”* and go *“drinking”*, rather than tend to his partner and daughter. He has managed his responsibility by admitting what he might have considered the lesser of two wrongs.

The narrative Sam has selected serves the purpose of appearing to be a full account of his early parenthood, albeit a cursory adolescent chronicle. As a rhetorical tool it appears a complete version of events. This obviates the need for greater inquiry and avoids the issue of Sam’s parental neglect being examined. Preserving a *“kid”* identity is far less reprehensible, than failing to attend to one’s paternal duties. Hence Sam has provided that account of events.

***Dual identities as not incurring change.***

Jim details his experience of being positioned within several identities. However his inner identity remains unchanged as a result of fatherhood. His account of being a father and a 16 year old adolescent could seem inconsistent and unclear. But when one considers that he is attempting to manage several powerful identities at once, the lack of reconciliation between them is understandable.

*Well probably at that stage [prior parenthood] I was just still out and about doing my own thing and umm probably felt the baby was going to tie me down from all those things, and not really give me a chance to finish what I was umm teenage years provide you. Actually I haven't really changed, I'm still fricken wild when I want to be, and ummm, at the same time I am still providing, I say more than enough for my son, so. Don't really think I have changed at all even though that adult thing seems to have come into it but, I know I am an adult now and, and, being a father. Still inside I am still a little kid.[]I don't see that I've gone completely out of childhood, ummm, I still, as I say I haven't changed anything, so basically I've become a father I s'pose that's manhood I s'pose, but um, my childhood is still there and I'm still living it like I think I would if I didn't have Kyle there.*

*Jim.*

Jim is remarkably flexible about the various identities he possesses. These identities take a range of forms and according to Jim they fail to proscribe each other. At the outset he positions himself **within a period** of teenage years, able to access what these years provide. He then states adulthood (“*that adult thing*”) has borne upon him. The “*thing*” within that, possibly has limited reference, and refers exclusively to the duties of fatherhood. He refers to adulthood as “*come[ing] into it*”, that is, adulthood (in the form of parenthood) has infused itself into his identity. His true position, however, remains essentially that of an adolescent. Although worded in a disordered form, he initially suggests becoming a father means becoming an adult, (“*I know I am an adult now and, and, being a father*”). Later he clearly states, fatherhood equates with manhood “*so basically I've become a father I s'pose that's manhood*”. This positions fatherhood as

something men do, not teenagers or children. Jim reconciles this exclusiveness by stating although he is a father, and therefore a man, his “*childhood*” remains at hand. It is “*still there*”. He has unrestricted access to it, despite having responsibilities for his son Kyle. Jim’s only explication of his doing “*fatherhood*” is to state it involves “*providing*” for his son. Providing he can do this, the period his inner identity occupies (“*childhood*”, “*teenage years*”, “*adult*”) is irrelevant. Fatherhood means being a provider, this can be performed at any age. Using these resources, Jim is able to position himself as both an adult and an adolescent. His arrangement of them constructs parenthood as something adults do, by doing parenthood, one self-constructs as an adult. That position acts as an overlay upon one’s identity. In Jim’s case, that of being an adolescent.

His reference to his own teenage-hood states it involved being “*out and about*”, being “*fricken wild*” whenever he so wished and being [*un*] *tie[d] down*. Jim then claims that parenthood has not affected his capacity to be so at all. He is able to provide “*more than enough for his son*” whilst still having unrestricted access to the liberties adolescence affords him. Jim’s ability to maintain these two divergent positions, that of an unrestricted adolescent and the paternal provider, probably has a limited life. At the time of his account, his son was three months old. As the duties of being a provider become a regular activity, Jim’s capacity to “*do his own thing*” may become very constrained. He could still be “*fricken wild*” whenever he so wishes, he just might not wish to be so as often. Contrary to his present position, he will have changed, not the capacity to be “*fricken wild*”.

Jim’s account provides a snapshot of the nascence of a fatherly identity. Aged 16, Jim is positioned in mid-adolescence. Fatherhood of a three month old son positions him with some major adult responsibilities. To expect the transition from a primarily adolescent identity to an adult identity to be a clear-cut one is unreasonable. Jim demonstrates how these conflicting identities (“*childhood*” and “*adult[hood]*”) are retained and negotiated in the initial period of fatherhood. In his case as an overlay, or something his inner identity does. He expresses no disquiet over his multiple positions. One could expect that as his occupation in providing for his family unit becomes his dominant activity, that

“adolescent” identity will subside. His identity as an adult-father will evolve as predominant.

***Duel identities as shooting yourself in the foot***

Norton constructs a very clear dichotomy of his identity, with strong inclinations toward his “kid” facet. Whereas Sam chastised himself for preserving his kid identity, and Jim asserted that side of himself is unimpeded by parenthood, Norton laments the constraints adulthood roles put on adolescence pursuits. These constraints are akin to “*shooting yourself in the foot*”.

*But now, life is like shut off. Like I'm not allowed out and about with the world. Like I got to stay home and do what I've got to do. Changed a lot. You're stupid alright cause you're fucken, your whole life is revolving around kids when you are still a kid and you don't want that. Cause you're still a kid and you want to go out and do the things kids do. Experiment, learn things, go to parties and stuff. It's all gone once you had kids.[ ]Like I shot myself in the foot and it's not gonna go away.[ ]You know I got, I reckon I got two personalities aye. Like I'm still a kid and I know that, or as a boy. But it changes you know. I'm a man when I want to be.[ ]Really I know I should be staying home with my family, cause you know, I made it that way. But, I, it's just something inside me doesn't want me to stay home all the time everyday. You know I just go, feel like I got no space or something, no freedom.*

*Norton.*

Like Sam and Jim, Norton uses the term “kid” to describe himself at 16. He selects this term rather than others such as ‘teenager’, ‘youth’ or ‘adolescent’. By choosing the extreme term kid, Norton makes the contrast with his status as a father more powerful. It highlights the incompatibility of his two identities and resists reconciliation between them. Fatherhood and youth are compatible, despite their co-occurrence being onerous. Unlike Jim above, fatherhood and kid(hood) are mutually exclusive. Norton has selected the term “kid” to emphasize their freak concurrence. He may want to “*still [be] a kid*”, but relative to his own kids, he is the adult. Using the term also contrasts the

preoccupation of each identity. Compared to doing fatherhood, the activities of youth are kids-stuff. They are about having fun and experimenting, playing and being irresponsible. Fatherhood involves ensuring the welfare of small children, providing for them and their care giver. It is the antithesis of adolescent self indulgence. It is across this gulf of difference that Norton is straddled.

Norton constructs fatherhood at 16 as "*shooting [yourself] in the foot*". It acts to terminate ("*shut off*") the freedom of adolescence and pins upon the father a myriad of responsibilities which cannot be ignored. Norton uses the term "*stupid*" to decry himself for having put himself in this position. His great lament is that the liberty adolescence afforded him has been irrevocably lost, as the duties he must perform are enduring. Norton is able to construct this lament only because he has a sense of duty to his children ("*I got to stay home and do what I've got to do*"). Were he unconcerned with them, parenthood would fail to impinge upon him doing "*things kids do*". He would not report shooting himself in the foot. His reporting it, is indicative of the strength of his "*man*" (paternal) identity, and it's resistance to concede to "*kid[hood]*".

The construction of adolescence Norton makes centres around "*going out*". "*Going out*" is what kids do, socializing and behaving without hindrance. In contrast, being a father involves "*staying home with my family*". Norton uses his self-construction as a kid to support his going out. It is what he should be doing, it is age appropriate behavior. He uses an extreme formulation to position its alternative as an unreasonable demand for a 16 year old, that is, "*stay[ing] home all the time everyday*". As he says, he "*has two personalities*" but each personality chastises itself for its behavior. The "*kid*" personality rebukes himself for having affected the responsibilities of an adult. That is "*shooting [oneself] in the foot*". In another portion of text his adult personality rebukes himself when he does "*go out*" saying "*I just feel guilty*" on account of neglecting his children.

The vexation evident in Norton's text is due to his duel identities wrestling with each other. Unlike Sam, Norton has not given himself over to one specific identity. To do so would construct the behavior of the other as untenable. It would transgress the nature

of that identity. “*Shooting [oneself] in the foot*” is an apt description. Norton limps within both identities, unable to be fully “*man*” due to his “*kid*” desires. He is unable to be fully “*kid*” due to his adult responsibilities.

### ***Summary***

This discourse is emblematic of adolescent fatherhood. It positions the young father as located between the duties of parenthood and the lure of adolescence independence. It is the ability to choose to take up those duties which fuels public concern over adolescent fatherhood. The above narratives provide three accounts of how the discourse can be used to position different males as they attempt to meet the duties of parenthood whilst still in their adolescence.

## **Improvement Discourse**

A notable theme for several participants was an acute awareness of the short-comings of their own childhood. With this in mind they positioned themselves as dedicated to ensure the childhood they provided for their offspring, was an improvement upon the one they experienced. As all the participants in the study were in either their mid or late adolescence, their own childhood still figured as a dominant linguistic resource. They were therefore in a strong position to make comparisons with their childhood due to its recency. For some participants this discourse had to be carefully managed so that they did not seem hyper-critical of their own parents’ parenting style. One effective management technique was to focus on issues of quantity rather than those of quality.

The discourse took three forms. The most common form constructed improvement as lavishing one’s child materially. Improvement was also constructed as being an available parent. At its widest level, improvement involved global changes in one’s lifestyle. All three had the common thread of displaying a sensitivity to the needs of one’s child, in contrast to a possible insensitivity one encountered as a child.

### ***Improvement as spoiling your child.***

In the below text Jed focuses on his intention to provide material provisions for his daughter, for the simple reason he wasn’t provided with these as a child.

*And you probably think the same way ,you try and give them what you didn't have. Because, well, because I've come from a broken family, you know and I mean my parents stuffed me up, and now, we're literally stuffed. And I don't want that for Ace. You know even though me and Mel aren't together fine. But I can still show her a good life. I mean I didn't, I was always a warehouse kid you know with warehouse stuff you know my parents didn't have much money or any thing like that so I mean. I wanna be able to buy her what she wants and spoil her rotten. I missed out on and even though people say to you 'okay that would be good for you, you weren't spoiled you learnt to earn your own money' and that kind of thing well it didn't do shit for me. I arrr, it just made me worse off. It made me petty and resentful of everybody else that did get things like that and it just made me more and more wanna not do anything you know. But yeah now that I had a daughter, I now think well okay, I want her to be able to go to school with the flash gears and all the fancy stuff and that you know . And, and make her other friends jealous. Just cause the simple thing is I didn't have that.*

*Jed.*

Jed's opportunity to provide amply for his daughter appears therapeutic in resolving the anguish he feels regarding his own childhood. He aims to "spoil her rotten". As a stand alone statement this could be interpreted as an inappropriate parental activity associated with the souring of a child's character by overindulgence. But above Jed uses the term to indicate his desire to ensure his daughter's sense of well being. He will do this by providing her in abundance with "the flash gears" etc. His given reason for doing this is that "I [he] didn't have that". Jed uses a personal testament to justify his position. His description of his broken family is strong ("we're literally stuffed") and accusatory of his parents("my parents stuffed me"). This is a salient issue for Jed, the bearing his parent's conduct had upon him and his siblings. His choice of language functions to position him as having experienced trauma and deprivation as a child. This Jed states, has impaired him. Having implicated coming from a broken home as party to "stuff[ing]" him, Jed must attend to his own culpability. Namely that he and his daughter's mother are not together. In an attempt to maintain his position as determined not to "stuff" his

own daughter, Jed states parental breakup is not a guaranteed determinant of becoming “*stuffed*”. He does so saying “*but I can still show her a good life*”. This is an attempt to repair the possibility that he could be considered to be doing to his own child, what his parents did to him, that is, break up his family and damage his sense of well-being.

The narrative now moves to focus on providing for his daughter. In contrast to the accusatory tone he used to discuss his parents’ breakup, when referring to their monetary circumstances, he is explanatory. His account lacks the sentiment his earlier mention of them did, “*my parents didn’t have much money or any thing like that*”. What is noteworthy is that given his paternal goal is to provide his daughter with all the “*flash stuff*”, he does not voice bitterness that his parents did not provide him with it. Instead he explains clearly why they were unable. They simply “*didn’t have much money*”. Jed does not cite them wasting their money, drinking or gambling it away. He has already been unreserved in his criticism of them, so there is little reason why he should not be now. If anything, attributing his childhood impoverishment to paternal alcoholism or gambling would explain in greater depth his family being “*stuffed*”. But Jed does not apportion blame for his deprivation. Rather Jed has set the stage for his next move, to account the bitterness he feels having grown up “*a warehouse kid*”. He does not attribute that deprivation to anyone. He just recounts how objectionable it was. And it is that position which he is committed not to subject his own child to.

Jed’s account positions him as a dedicated parent determined to improve upon the childhood he received. The salient feature he wishes to address is his having been raised a “*warehouse kid*”. Reference to his parents’ dysfunction (“*stuff[ing] him*”, “*broken family*”) serves to establish Jed’s childhood as calamitous and damaging. Once positioned as having experienced a nefarious childhood, Jed is able to state he does not wish the same for his daughter. Prefacing the statement with “*you probably think the same*” establishes this as normal. Jed constructs himself as doing fatherhood ‘normally’, by improving upon the parenting he received. By citing being a “*warehouse kid*” as the most salient detraction of his childhood, Jed focuses on an area he can remedy. He can provide his child with “*flash gears*” and “*fancy stuff*”. Those items are measurable and

tangible. They are instantly indicative of Jed's commitment as a parent. Providing materially will circumvent the possibility of her developing the same bitterness Jed developed as a kid.

Upon explication of Jed's account there appears to be little relation between his parents' behavior and his wish to provide his daughter with flash stuff. The impetus to provide lavishly for her springs from him having gone without, not his parents' dysfunction (stuffing Jed and his siblings). Detailing their dysfunction positions Jed as aware that parents have a powerful impact on children. And he wants his impact to be a positive one.

***Improvement as being around more.***

This discourse centered upon the amount of parental contact the participant had as a child, with the amount of contact he chooses to have with his child. The participant positioned himself as having improved upon his parents' performance by "*being around more*".

*Ummm I reckon it [thinking about my childhood] can make me, make me a better parent cause I can do some of the things that, that they didn't do cause they. I know they loved me cause they did. But they never told me all the time. Yeah. Ummm, well, I always, I'm always giving her cuddles, and you know, reading her something. Ummm, telling her I love her, talk about her day and that kinda stuff. My dad did but not to the extent that I did. [ ] like me as a father, I spend more time than my dad did, he was always working overseas. Yeah he would go overseas for about four months out of the year or something, to work. I wouldn't go. But that yeah, the job he was doing that is all he knew. And ummm, yeah I just, it's just better cause I am always around her. I don't like going away for long periods of time .*

*Sam.*

In Sam's account dissonance between his parents' parenting and his own parenting is managed by stating it was not the quality of the interaction he received, rather it was the

quantity, “*they never told me all the time [that they loved me]*”. Still not wishing to appear critical, Sam qualifies his statement again, by explaining why the quantity was lacking, “*he would go overseas for about four months out of the year or something, to work*”. He then qualifies his father’s choice to work overseas even more with the justification “*the job he was doing that is all he knew*”. Despite all that, Sam states were he in the same circumstances, he “*wouldn’t go*”. Sam uses this circuitous route to state his father’s choices regarding work and parenting, were not ideal. And as they are not ideal, Sam would not make them himself. The big difference between Sam’s parenting and his father’s is that Sam chooses to be “*around*” all the time. His father’s absence had a notable impression upon Sam. This may be because that paternal absence was experienced during Sam’s formative years. As these years were very recent, they are still fresh in Sam memory. He initially states he was “*always working overseas*”. This is changed to “*go overseas for about four months out of the year*”. What is the function of this clarification, specifying the period he was overseas? Sam’s initial reported impression is that his father was constantly working offshore. His clarification contradicts that, he was only overseas a third of the year. By being specific, Sam gives the impression of a factual account of his father’s absence, one which is thereby more reliable. Whatever its period it was a salient issue for Sam. It is his father’s four months absence he notes, not his eight months presence.

“*Being around more*” involves a greater amount of interaction with his daughter than he had with his father when he was present. It provides a continuity which Sam lacked with his own father. Sam constructs himself as a very active father, *cuddl[ing]*, *read[ing to]*, *talk[ing with]*, *telling her I[he] loves her*. By using a contrast with the lesser “*extent*” his father interacted, he positions himself as more occupied with his role than his father was. His self-positioning is a difficult one to manage. He wishes to report himself as wanting to be a better parent, without detracting from the parenting he received himself. He does this by stating it is the level of activity that distinguishes him from his parents, not the quality.

Sam concedes that a large part of his father’s parenting style was determined by his circumstances. But part was just the modus operandi his father took as a parent. Having

sighted lacunas in that style, and averred he would not tenant them himself, Sam constructs himself as improving on the parenting he received.

***Improvement as being different.***

Paikia constructs improvement as raising his son different from the way he was raised. That difference has a material and emotional component, as well as an issue of protection. Paikia uses this discourse to explain his resolution to separate from his family of origin for the benefit of his son.

*Arrrr [my son's life is similar to my childhood] in the way that my dad had an alcohol problem. Different in the way that I am trying to fight to keep my family together. Not let the drink get in between us. I have, I have a couple of times but. I'm just giving him the attention that he needs. You know. Just I'm buying him material things and, material things that I didn't have. Ummm, yeah the love and the, attention that he needs. It's a lot different to when I was getting brought up.[] My side of the family, didn't have much to do with him. Or it's not cause they don't want to . Cause I don't want them to. Oh just they're fucken too negative. They are, we're just a negative family. Yeah. Don't want him to be brought up to seeing all that. Yeah or protect him from the stuff that I saw. Yeah. His life is just opposite from how I was brought up. Orr everybody says that, everybody says I'm gonna give my boy what I don't have. Or what ever give my kids what I didn't have when I was younger. Everybody says that. Yeah.*

*Paikia.*

Similar to Jed, Paikia constructs the notion of giving one's offspring whatever one did not receive as a child, as commonplace. Doing so has two functions. Initially it depicts the childhood the person experienced as lacking in some form. In Paikia's case, it was lacking not just material items, but love and attention. The second function of this statement is to position the father as having reflected upon his childhood and been sensitive to its detractions. The conclusion he makes, however, that his childhood was deleterious, is not indubitable. He could respond with "it didn't do me any harm [going

without]”, or that it was not deficient at all. Instead Paikia affirms that the fathering he received was flawed. Doing so positions him as committed to his child, despite the responsibilities that commitment will engender. A responsibility he refers to, winning a battle with alcohol, is one he notes his father was unable to meet. The nature of parenting Paikia constructs, is that each generation attempts to improve on the parenting of the generation before. In his case, that involves that childhood being “*different*” from his own.

Paikia’s initial statement that he has an alcohol problem but is dealing with it, functions to establish his credibility. He states his shortcoming “*I have a couple of times [let the drink come in between us].*” But then quickly lists what he is providing “*material things*”, “*love*”, “*attention*”. This rhetorical technique diverts one from his battle to deal with alcohol, to what he does provide for his son. Admitting that he has let alcohol come between him and his family “*a couple of times*” functions to support his credibility. He concedes he is human, but unlike his father he is addressing the issue of alcohol.

The most dramatic resolution Paikia has made, is to isolate his own family from his family of origin. The given reasons for this are amorphous, what being “*too negative*” constitutes, and exactly what “*stuff*” he does not wish his son to “*see [ing]*” is vague. This imprecision gives Paikia the benefit of making a particular inference. His intended use of the word “*negative*” is clearly dissimilar from the usual interpretation of it, generally meaning pessimistic or cynical. The negativity his family possesses involves acts (*stuff*) which is[are] unfit for children to see. This infers things such as violence and/or sexual impropriety. The inference is that things in his family of origin were very bad. And you would not let children witness them. Making a clear break from that positions Paikia as dedicated to improving on his own childhood.

This discourse has the value of popular appeal which Paikia alludes to (*everybody says that*). It positions him as sensitive to the needs of children and committed to providing for their welfare. The contrast provided by comparison with his own childhood, constructs him as clearly doing ‘fatherhood’ different.

### ***Summary***

This discourse positioned participants as having considered the nature of their own childhood and sought to improve upon it. The three forms it takes are symptomatic of the salient detractions each participant recalls. The omissions Jed and Sam address are time and quality toys and clothing. These provisions act to reassure their child of the commitment and love their fathers feel for them. The value of these commodities is all to acutely felt by these two as they experienced their deficit as children. Paikia's changes are more global. To ensure his son's welfare he disengages from his family of origin and expunges from himself obstructions to better parenting. All three use the discourse to position themselves as determined to do better by their children, than they were done by as children themselves.

### **The Responsibility Discourse**

The Responsibility discourse was used by most participants to position themselves as committed fathers. The onerous nature of adolescent fatherhood, with its circumscription of personal freedom and independence, is anathema to the adolescent lifestyle. Central to the concerns regarding adolescent fatherhood is the issue of fathers being prepared or able to forego their personal freedom and fulfill their paternal duties. This discourse functioned to depict the participant as having resolved, or attempted to resolve issues of lost opportunity, and taken on the responsibility of fatherhood. The discourse operated in four forms and acted as a nexus for all of the other five discourses.

#### ***Responsibility as a consequence***

Responsibility was constructed as a direct consequence of sexual activity. Involvement in a sexual act, with its tangible consequences (a baby), positioned a father as indisputably responsible for that child's welfare.

*I was man enough to fucken stick it in, I gotta be man enough to look after it and stay there. Stick it in all the way through with my kids. And like they [my parents] pressured me and that. Always pressured me 'you wanted to make them*

*you gotta fucken look after them'. Stuff like that. You wanted to make them you got to look after them aye.*

*Norton.*

Using the active voicing of his parents, Norton details the responsibilities he faces. Being undeniably responsible for the biological production of his two children, he is psychologically and socially responsible for their welfare. The issue is closely linked to his masculinity as detailed in his parents directives. If he is prepared to engage in masculine sexual behavior, he must be prepared to take a masculine familial role. Namely, being a provider. The parental responsibility he faces is presented as a cause and effect equation: "*man enough to fucken stick it in, [ ] man enough to look after it*". This equation is indisputable, there are no get out clauses or exceptions. The equation lacks subtlety, it is brutal and direct making no accommodations for the age of the father. In the above quote Norton lacks a strong sense of commitment to his responsibilities. Rather he rehearses his parents' instructions, which have been pressured upon him. They must impress upon him the consequences of his behavior, and they "*pressure*" him as to what he must do. The use of the hydraulic metaphor "*pressure*" is apt. He is placed, compressed into one position, that of being a father, having to "*do*" responsibility. Like an object under pressure, there is no position of happy compromise. He either makes it [as a father] or breaks it.

He positions himself as a 16 year old son receiving advice from his parents. Unlike his peers who might receive counsel on career choices or school work, he is taking advice on how to be a parent himself. This is an ironical arrangement, an adolescent receiving parental advice on being a parent. But Norton's identity as a child or youth has been swiftly terminated, he must now commence the adult role of fatherhood. His discomfort at such an abrupt transition is hinted at in his description of his parents indicating his new calling, "*you gotta fucken look after them*". The lengthy duration of those fatherhood responsibilities is alluded to with the resources "*stay there*" and "*stick it in all the way*". Norton is able to appreciate the enduring nature of the task he faces. These are his circumstances, and parental responsibility is ineluctable. It makes no concession for his youth. Elsewhere Norton uses the following phrase to encapsulate his

circumstance, *"I laid my nest, now I gotta lie in it"*. Although misquoting the axiom, he constructs responsibility as an inevitable consequence demanding long term commitment. It is a black and white outcome of his sexual activity.

A fellow adolescent father, Jed, gave a more succinct precis of responsibility as a consequence: *"The thing is you know, I put it in, something came out and the end result is responsibility"*. Jed uses his sexual activity to indict himself as responsible. He does not seek to negotiate or lessen his obligations. There is no facility for exculpation. He is resolved to his paternal duties. The equation he makes is simple, its commonsense indicated with his phrase *"the thing is you know"*. That is, one can not know otherwise. If you father a child, you have to parent it. That is responsibility, an unavoidable consequence.

Using this discourse participants constructed themselves as duty bound to take responsibility for their offspring. It also established that they had to at one point have considered the task of being a parent, despite its invidious duties for an adolescent. This could be used to offset any opprobrium they may experience for having entered into fatherhood at such an ill-prepared age.

### ***Responsibility as sacrifice***

Participants used this discourse to construct themselves as prepared to make major sacrifices for the benefit of their child. Relationships, travel, social life, education and careers, were all examples of pursuits which had been relegated. Below Justin details how he has sacrificed aspects of his personal life so he can parent to the best of his abilities.

*Yeah. Like you've constantly got to make sacrifices, ummm. Choosing whether or not you can or can't go out and other things. Ummmm, I also wanted to be my own business by twenty one. I don't see that happening in six months so that's been held back three or four years. Ummm but that's choices I have made. I have turned down jobs overseas as well. But... Cause my priority is not really my career at the moment, it is Tony and my career comes after that at the*

*moment. He is my main priority. I got no problem with that really. I have made a lot of decisions that put me in the back seat. And ummmmm, at the moment I am putting myself first for my career as much as I can, but still being at least three days with Tony.*

*Justin*

By positioning himself as prepared to make sacrifices, Justin constructs himself as a dedicated father. The sacrifices he makes are major and plentiful (“*lot of decisions*”). Becoming a father at such a developmentally significant age complicates his preparations for adulthood. Justin concedes without reservation, that doing fatherhood responsibly incurs personal sacrifice.

Justin’s account highlights the “*choices*” he has. Were he not a father he could pursue unbridled his career aspirations. Being a father, he must consider what aspect of himself is paramount, and in his case it is that as a father. All other spheres of his life are negotiated with his paternal responsibilities as their centre point. This is the nature of fatherhood for Justin, sacrificing what he would really like to do (“*be in [his] own business*”, “[*take*] jobs overseas”) so that he can be responsible. Salient in Justin’s account is his strong career drive. He manages to arrange himself so that he can at least give it some portion of his attention. Although the portion of the week devoted to this is larger than that devoted to parenting, overall fathering is Justin’s uppermost responsibility (“*priority*”). His statement “*me in the back seat*” is used to indicate the degree of sacrifice he is prepared to make. It is his son in the front seat, determining his life’s direction. Justin alludes to this state of affairs as not being permanent with his statement “*my priority [at the moment] is Tony*”. He has chosen to put in the hard work while Tony is still a little boy. Justin could consider delaying the timing of his paternal input. Establishing a fatherly relationship with his son, once he has his own business. But for Justin the most pressing responsibility is to parent presently. His business aspirations will need to wait as his son will be a child only once. This position may be strengthened by Justin’s knowledge that there was a time when Tony did not come first (see above). This displays a sensitivity to his child’s developmental needs, and a preparedness to sacrifice to meet those needs.

Justin lists three sacrifices fatherhood has obliged him to make, a rhetorical move which adds weight to his account. By using the term sacrifice, he indicates there is a regrettable loss. In this case career opportunity and social life. But with any sacrifice the gain will eventually exceed the deficit. Elsewhere Justin alludes to that: “*you need to put yourself out if you want to do it [parenting]. If you are willing to do that, I think it is worth it in the end*”. He has delayed (“*sacrifice[d]*”) immediate gratification for the purpose of building a substantial relationship with his son. This casts himself as something other than an adolescent father. He is able to meet adult responsibilities (fatherhood) with maturity.

The responsibility as sacrifice discourse is used by Justin to construct himself as a committed father. For Justin the issue is undebatable. To be a good father he must sacrifice major desires. The greater the sacrifice the greater the responsibility Justin is taking to be a committed father. Having a child in one’s adolescence clearly compromises one’s own social development. This discourse constructs adolescent fathers as clear about the issues they are unprepared to compromise, namely the welfare of their child.

#### ***Responsibility as looking after your children***

Participants used the above discourse to construct themselves as taking care of their children. It positioned them as stereotypical male providers, indistinguishable from any set of older fathers. Below Seth details his experience of looking after his children.

*You look after them, maybe not as much but you start looking after the things that are around. Like arrrrr, bills. Cause I suppose they are a part of that. Just, just, things that they might want or, or something like that. Yeah.. [ ]It’s, it’s a bit weird going to work everyday, having a job. Ummm, I’m not really too sure why. Cause in the end that all does come back to them. So, yeah. Or I think. And where you give things up is, is pretty, pretty hard.*

*Seth.*

Seth constructs responsibility as looking after his children’s necessities of life. He *does* responsibility by earning the money to pay the bills for the provisions his sons require to be “*looked after*”. His use of the terms “*the things that are around*” or “*something*

*they may want*” constructs a very vague account of looking after his children. Such vague formulations are a powerful rhetorical technique. They make a clear inference, in this case that Seth does provide all the things around, without recourse to elaborate detail. This implies all the things his children might require *are* provided, and positions Seth as being a responsible father. By being unspecific, Seth manages to avoid any counter argument, that as an adolescent father of two children, his ability to look after them is questionable.

He alludes to the irony of his departure for work with the term “*it’s a bit weird*”. The irony may lie in that to “*look after*” those for whom he is responsible, he must leave them each workday. But that is the fate of most male parents of very young children, to provide for their children they must make themselves absent. This statement could also be interpreted as Seth referring to his swift entry into the workforce, he may have never worked prior fatherhood. But what Seth does say about work, and supporting dependents by work, is that it is weird. By referring to going to work as weird, not objectionable or perplexing, he manages his self-construction as responsible. The discomfort he experiences, feeling “*weird*”, is attributed to going to work. It is not attributed to anything which could be construed as him having difficulties providing for (“*looking after*”) his children. Seth’s account therefore details issues he has with his role, while maintaining his self-construction as a responsible parent.

Seth’s initial statement, “...*you look after them, maybe not as much but you start looking after the things...*” describes another transition. The first “*look after*” possibly refers to his original experience of fatherhood, being a new father who feeds his son and changes his nappies. As he adjusts to the long haul of fatherhood, and as his children establish early independence, that role subsides. It is replaced with the role of a provider. “*Looking after*” takes a more mundane form, with far less sentiment. Positioning himself as having made this transition Seth now takes a more global role of “*looking after*” his children. He now looks after the “*things around them*”, which ensure their welfare. Seth uses this account to position himself as responsible. The bedrock of his operation, the reason he goes to work, is to provide for his children.

Finally Seth draws on the responsibility as sacrifice discourse with his statement “*where you give things up is, is pretty, pretty hard.*” Positioning this discourse where he does, functions to accentuate the degree to which Seth is dedicated to “*looking after*” his boys. To “*look after*” them properly, to do fatherhood responsibly, Seth has to sacrifice.

***Responsibility as making a change.***

Responsibility was constructed as a change participants would make in order to meet the needs of their child. It was used particularly to highlight the contrast in conduct of the adolescent father, as he made an attempt to be responsible. The contrast could be made between the adolescent male prior parenthood and him after it. It might also be made between his conduct once he was a parent and the conduct of his peers. Below Jed provides an account of the former nature.

*Yeah. Well cause I mean I just thought from then on ‘shit here I am, I’s thinking I am unemployed, I’ve got no job prospects. I got, no, no thought on life. You know I had no vision of where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do or who I wanted to be. But I had a baby on the way.....So then the instant thing to think was yeah okay, now I do have to think about that. You know, where’m I going, where is everything leading to. And that’s when we decided to move to Wellington. Why..... Umm, work, money, Yeah so we moved to Wellington. And we could then start to be able to afford things. We were all set up for bubs before she was even here.....You know she was the only reason that was really getting me off my arse..... No once, once you have a kid, everything changes.*

*Jed..*

Jed uses a contrast to position himself as being a responsible expectant father. That contrast is between Jed prior prospective fatherhood and him after it. He constructs his life prior fatherhood as very dire, *prospect[less]* and *vision[less]*. He uses this extreme description to position himself as very ill prepared for parenthood. By arranging his pre-parent account of himself in the form of a list, he gives the impression that this was a complete and full depiction of himself at the time. By accentuating the hopeless position he occupied then, Jed constructs himself presently as being remarkably responsible. That

is, he has made momentous changes so he can provide for his child. The narrative Jed provides makes a clear causal relationship between his future fatherhood, and him getting “*off his arse*”. He cites his daughter as being the exclusive (“*only*”) reason he made that change. Doing so positions him as a responsible father who acted not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of his daughter.

In his account of his pre-parenthood self Jed focus’ on mentalistic concepts. It is “*vision*”, “*prospects*” “*thought[s]*”, “*aim[s]*” and “*be[ing]*” which he cites as deficient. In his later account of circumstances once he had moved to Wellington, he cites being able to “*afford things*” which situates him as “*all set up for bubs*”. The attributional process Jed has used is to imply that having made changes to his “*vision*” “*thought[s]*” *etc* about what he “*wanted to be*”, he was able to effect changes which would enable him to provide material possessions for his daughter. Doing so he constructs the ability to “*get off [one’s] arse*” as an internal process. A process he engaged when he became cognizant of his future parenthood. His use of the term “*all set up*” to describe being prepared for his child has rhetorical value. Exactly what it means is unclear. This lack of clarity allows Jed to construct himself as having been a responsible parent by being fully prepared, without qualifying exactly what that entailed.

Jed’s account of changing to be responsible has three sections. He commences with a description of his gloomy circumstances prior the prospect of fatherhood. He concludes with an account of being fully prepared for his future child and as such responsible. The mid-ground between these two points he sets with the statement “*then [upon learning he was to be a father] the instant thing to think was yeah okay, now I do have to think about that*”. This positions Jed as alert to his possible responsibilities. He could have discarded the information. But he positions himself as a responsible (future) father by stating in those circumstances he was compelled (“*have to*”) to consider it.

Jed uses the process of change to construct himself as responsible. He is alert to the demands parenthood will place upon him, and rises to meet these. Using a powerful contrast, his account details the degree he rose/changed to satisfy those demands. For Jed, doing responsibility meant doing change.

*Summary*

This discourse encapsulates the powerful effect parenthood has on males who become adolescent fathers. Becoming a father, they state, is not something which can be discarded. It incurs enormous and immediate change, all of which can be considered as being responsible. The responsibility discourse is a clear contrast with an impression that adolescent fathers have little regard for their offspring. The four forms this discourse takes; sacrifice, consequence, looking after and making change, outline the paramount position their child holds. Although invidiously positioned, they take up the ineluctable duties of fatherhood with a resolve indistinguishable from that of an older age set of fathers.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In 1968 A. A. Campbell made the below assessment regarding adolescent pregnancy:

*“The girl who has an illegitimate child at the age of 16 suddenly has 90% of her life [ ] written for her. She will probably drop out of school[ ] she will probably not be able to find a steady job. She may feel impelled to marry someone she might not otherwise have chosen [ ] Her life choices are few and most of them are bad.”* (p. 238).

Although Campbell’s analysis is from a complimentary area it has major relevance to this study, but not in the form Campbell would have imagined. His prognosis for girls in the above situation was a dire financial forecast, squandered potential and long term relationship dissatisfaction. He uses the word “*written*” but it functions to read as “*written off*”. For the males involved in this research, adolescent fatherhood did not write out or write off their life’s course. Rather it operated to ‘re-script’ their lives.

Empirical research finds a notable portion of the males becoming adolescent fathers are from circumstances poorly disposed to parenthood. Springing from a lower SES section of society and with few resources, they appear ill equipped to deal with the pressing demands of fatherhood. But that is where such empirical research ends. Its analysis is akin to Campbell’s prognosis. The epistemological assumptions they make fail to consider the semiotic effect fatherhood might have on young males. For the adolescent fathers involved in this study, fatherhood was like a ‘Road to Damascus’ experience: undeniable, unavoidable, and forever life changing. For all, fatherhood was a catalyst which activated a deep, and possibly innate, sense of responsibility and duty which few would have imagined present in teenage boys. The extent of that responsibility is captured within the Responsibility Discourse. Despite their youth and ill-preparedness, fatherhood impressed upon them the duty to perform as a responsible parent. That discourse is primary in locating the central effect parenthood has on the males involved in this study. The Agent for Change Discourse accounts the transformation affected by the males so as to be responsible. Participants were clear that fatherhood invokes a global metamorphosis, not just of their behavior, but their very identity. That change was

not as smooth or complete as one might hope. The Duel Identities Discourse detailed the formidable task of such a swift transformation for the benefit of their children. All were cognizant of their need to be dutiful fathers. Initially the recency of their unencumbered adolescence attenuated their best wishes to father dutifully. For most participants, as the breadth of their fatherly role became more apparent, and their identity as a father eclipsed that of an adolescent, this conflict subsided. Their desire to ensure their child's life was not hampered or marred as their's might have been, is encapsulated within the Improvement Discourse. This discourse positioned these fathers as having critically reviewed their own childhoods. It indicated that although they may have entered into fatherhood blithely and unwittingly, it would not be something they performed without consideration. Even within their early adolescence they displayed an awareness of the need to expunge from their child's life that which is nefarious, and include that which is edifying. This indication that fatherhood had been given intense consideration, and the quality of their child's life was central to them, was evident in all of the discourses. The arduousness of doing fatherhood as well as they could in their adolescence was depicted in the Premature Discourse. Participants were clear, fatherhood in one's adolescence was far from ideal. This discourse accounted the difficulties and interferences they experienced or met as they attempted to parent as well as they could. These difficulties were generally unique to adolescent parenthood. They could have been avoided by delaying parenthood several years. This discourse was a concession. A concession that they as fathers were party to an unwise and foolish act, having a child when too young. But the task before them was to parent their child as well as they could, despite their circumstances. The Compromised Discourse positioned their experience at a societal level. Being a section of society with little power and few resources, adolescent fathers are easily caricatured, stereotyped and exploited. This discourse depicted the forms that exploitation could take, as well as the external factors which attenuated their paternal performance.

All males in this study constructed fatherhood as a turning point in their lives. They may have displayed adolescent flippancy or disregard at the time they were party to their child's conception. But upon becoming fathers, the gravity and momentousness of parenthood weighed upon them ineluctably. Being a father was not approached with

disregard. Its responsibilities pressed upon them to examine their lives and 're-script' them for the benefit of their child. Parenthood propelled them into adult roles and duties. Equipped with an adolescent skill base they are poorly positioned to tackle such duties and often ill-supported. Campbell's (1968) prognosis focuses on what the pregnant teenager has forfeited. In this study what emerged was what these young fathers gained. For many fatherhood filled an identity vacuum. It did not give them not an adolescent identity for the purpose of peer impression. It gave a deep inner identity with a child for whom they knew they were responsible. They took on a social status which has its value not in having performed a biological act, but in performing a social activity, fathering. To make that performance these young fathers affected major changes in their personal lives. Their importance to a helpless child, sensitized them to their own innate importance. Accordingly they addressed their lives and expunged or attempted to expunge those elements which were vitiating. Campbell's assessment fails to consider such effects of adolescent parenthood. Such effects are difficult to quantify and too subjective for observation. Additionally adolescent vacillation and discouragement can undermine the clarity of such effects.

All young fathers who participated in this study were sensitive to the perilous nature of parenthood in one's adolescence. Having embarked upon it however, they resolved to do as well as they possibly could under the circumstances. Within their emotional repertoire, regret did not feature. Within their logic, however, they were clear they would never recommend such a life course. Doing fatherhood in one's adolescence was about growing up very quickly, putting oneself second and not lamenting lost opportunities. The criticisms made of Erickson's appraisal of adolescent fatherhood are cardinal. Erickson(1950) considered adolescent males unable to deal with the identity diffusion fatherhood would provoke. But this observation is based on the assessed nature of adolescents who are not parents. The metamorphosis evinced by adolescent males who become fathers, is only evident from a position of parenthood. Fatherhood acts as an irrefutable call to duty, one no less audible to adolescent males than to males of any age.

The results of this study fracture many of the stereotypes about adolescent fathers. Those stereotypes picture them as distant, aloof and disinterested. It proves they want the best for their children and are prepared to struggle for that. Only having recently obtained their own sense of identity, they are launched into the adult role of nurturing and providing for an infant. This study provides an insight into the means by which such adolescent fathers give sense to that experience. It provides an account of parenthood under invidious conditions and with few resources. The study failed to address the exact nature of those father-child bonds. But there are limits as to what can be explored using academic inquiry. Also there is a point where accounting says so little, and yet so much. In response to the inquiry why he wanted to see his son constantly Al said "*cause he's my son*". When asked why he felt shameful that he sometimes forgot if his two year old daughter was born on either the 21<sup>st</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, Jed said "*cause she's my daughter*". No further elaboration was required. That he is my son, or that she is my daughter, explains everything in-terms of my feelings for him or her.

The clarity with which the adolescent males in this study responded to fatherhood is salient. Fatherhood was not a dally, a whim or sport they toyed with. Fatherhood gave a meaning to their life which is unequivocal. I became a father in my mid thirties. I did so once I had completed my education, traveled the world for two years, experimented with life, secured a lucrative income, got married, and with my wife secured our own home, and acquired all the prerequisites for parenthood in the middle class. The acts and life courses of the males who participated in this study were the antithesis of the mores and standards I held dear. However, having completed this research, I found myself asking, prior becoming a father, did I do anything of any real value? The males who participated in this study embarked on a undertaking of enormous value very early in life. All were acutely aware of the paramount importance of that undertaking, and their duty to perform it as well as they could.

## APPENDICES:

N.B.: For the purposes of participant anonymity, identifying information has been expunged from the documents appearing within these appendices.

### **Appendix A: Information sheet for participants**

#### **Adolescent Fathers: A Discourse Analysis of their Attitudes to fatherhood**

Many thanks for taking the time to consider being involved in this study.

I am a student at Massey University, I am also a high school teacher at XXXXX College in XXXXXXX. I have a Bachelors degree in Psychology and a Diploma in Teaching. I am doing a research project on what it is like to be a father while you are still an adolescent (aged 13-18 years old). The purpose is to find out what things are important to you as a young father, and how you operate as a dad. I have asked the guidance counselor at your school to give you this information sheet.

The study involves interviewing you for between 45 minutes to an hour and discussing life as a young father. The interview may be shorter or longer, it will be up to you. There will be no pressure to talk, you will be free to discuss things or not to discuss them. If you agree, the interview will be recorded so that I can type out everything you have said. That way, by examining what you have said, I can find out what are the most important things to you as a parent.

To protect your privacy, I am the only person that will listen to your tape. When I type it out, I will give you and your child, and anyone else significant you mention a nick name. You might even want to select the names they are given, maybe adopt a nick name for yourself. That way no one can tell it was you who said it and things are kept confidential for you. When I am finished with the tape, either you can have it, I could destroy it, or it could be put into a storage safe place where only I have access to it. You choose which of these three things you want done. As well as changing the names of the people when I type out the interview, I will also change names of things like schools, teachers, places and other identifying features.

I am planning to interview about 20 young fathers. The procedure will be the same for each one.

If you choose to be involved in the interview, this is what you can expect:

- You can ask questions about the study at anytime you like.
- If you change your mind, and you decide you don't want to be involved in it anymore, that is okay. You can withdraw.
- In the interview, there may be questions you do not want to answer. That is fine, you don't have to answer them.
- In the interview you will be allowed to turn the tape recorder off at anytime.
- You can expect to get a summary of my results once the study is over.

I will type the interview out as a transcript, and I will give you a copy of the transcript. You will be allowed to correct or delete any sections of the transcript you want. If you want to withdraw from the research you are free to do so up to that point.

I will use the information from different interviews to write a thesis. That is a lengthy essay, which describes something in great detail. Once I have completed it, I will send you a summary of the results.

Those participating will be interviewed in any of the following places:

1. At their school, in suitable offices.
2. At their private home.
3. At another venue of their choice.

All interviews will occur outside school hours.

It may cost you money to get to the interview. I will give you a refund of any expenses you incurred to get to the interview to a total cost of \$10.

If you have any questions regarding the interview, or this research, you are free to contact me or my supervisor to discuss them. This project has been approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/108.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of my request

Researcher: Gareth Rouch

Supervisor: Dr Keith Tuffin

Tel: 00-000 0000 (work) XXXXX College

Tel: 00-000 0000 ext. 000

P O Box 000

XXXXXX College

XXXXX.

Yours sincerely

Gareth Rouch

Gareth Rouch

## **Appendix B: Consent form for participants.**

### Adolescent Fathers: A Discourse Analysis of their Attitudes to fatherhood

#### **Consent Form for Participants**

I have read the information sheet about this study and have had it explained to me. I am happy to be interviewed about my experience as an adolescent father. I agree to the interview being taped and the researcher using the information I give him for his study

- I understand I do not have to participate in this research.
- I understand that if I have any questions about this study I can ask them at any time.
- I understand that if I want to withdraw from this study I can do so.
- I know if I want to turn the tape recorder off at any time I can do so.
- I also understand I can decline to answer any question I don't want to answer at any time.
- I know the information I give the researcher can only be used for his study and publications that result from that study.
- I understand he will type the interview out as a transcript, and I will get a copy of the transcript. I will be allowed to correct or delete any sections of the transcript I want to. I understand I will be able to withdraw from the research at any time up to this point.
- I will be provided with a summary of the findings of this research.
- My name will not be used in this research, or the name of anyone I mention. This will be done to protect my/their anonymity. Any other identifying information will be removed from the transcript made of my talk.

I understand every effort will be made to keep the information he gets from me confidential. I also understand I will not be mentioned personally in his study, but I might be quoted. However, no one except the researcher will be able to identify the quote came from me.

I agree to participate in this study and do not object to the interview.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio-taped (Please verify which one does not apply).

Signed.....

Date.....

Name.....

## **Appendix C: Background Information for School Counselors.**

### Adolescent Fathers: A Discourse Analysis of their Attitudes to Fatherhood

#### Background Information for School Counselors

Many thanks for responding to my phone call regarding my request for assistance in approaching potential research participants. As I detailed in my call, I am completing a masters thesis on the experience of fatherhood by adolescent males. The research involves interviewing up to 20 adolescent males who have fathered a child. Interviews will be recorded and I will transcribe them for the purpose of my research. During the process all personal identities will be expunged so only I as the researcher am able to identify who said what. Additionally only I will have access to the tape recordings, unless the research participant requests to have them.

#### Purpose.

The aim of the research is to obtain greater understanding of the experience of adolescent males who become fathers. This could be used in the provision of improved services for such a population, or family planning education for high school students.

#### Conditions.

The interviews shall be conducted outside of school class time. All potential participants will have the right to decline participation. All those choosing to participate will have the right to withdraw from the study, or to turn off the recording equipment at any time. They will be free to ask any questions about the study. Paternal/guardian permission will be sought from the parents of those under 16 years of age. Those participating will be interviewed in any of the following places:

1. At their school, in suitable offices.
2. At their private home.
3. At another venue of their choice.

All interviews will occur outside school hours.

Contacting Potential Participants.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in contacting males at your school who fit the research criteria, and might be agreeable to being involved in the research. Enclosed is an information sheet for potential participants. Would you kindly consider approaching such students and discussing with them my research.. They could have a few days to consider my proposal and then get back to you. If they are agreeable, they may wish to pass on to you their contact details, which you could then forward to me. If they decline participation, no further approaches shall be made. If there are potential participants at your school, then I shall seek approval from your school principal and Board of Trustees before I make contact with possible participants.

If you have any questions regarding the interview, or this research, you are free to contact me or my supervisor to discuss them. This project has been approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/108.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of my request

Yours sincerely

Gareth Rouch

Researcher: Gareth Rouch

Tel: 00-000 0000 (work) XXXXX College

P O Box 000

XXXXXX College

XXXXX.

Supervisor: Dr Keith Tuffin

Tel: 00-000 0000 ext. 000

**Appendix D: Options for the Disposal/storage of audio-tapes****Options for the Disposal/storage of audio-tapes**

Once your interview has been recorded, I am going to type out everything you have said. I will change your name and any other significant names you mention, so no one can identify whose story it is. Once I have done this, I don't require the tape any longer. What would you like me to do with it? (Tick whichever you select).

Give it back to you.

Destroy it.

Put it in a safe storage site where only I can have access to it.

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....

## **Appendix E: Interview Format.**

### **Stage one**

Initial introduction/re-introduction.

Reiteration of the purpose of the research project.

Reiteration of the purpose of the interview.

Detailing the participants right to

- Withdraw from the interview.
- Request the audio-tape be turned off at anytime.
- Decline to answer any questions.
- Request sections of the interview not be included in the research.
- The right to read and edit the final transcript of the interview.
- The right to have their transcription not included in the final research project.

Careful explanation of the provision of a support person if the participant finds the interview upsetting and they require emotional support at some point during the interview or at its conclusion

Establishing rapport and confidence with the participants.

### **Stage two**

Details regarding child.

Details regarding the relationship with the mother of the child.

Description of the relationship with her before pregnancy and birth.

Initial reaction of the participant upon learning of her being pregnant.

Reaction of family/whanau/aiga upon being informed

Options considered at time of the pregnancy.

- Adoption
- Abortion
- Marriage
- Termination of the relationship.
- Whakawhangai.

Reasons for selected outcome

Feeling at time of the birth regarding the child

Change in one's relationship with the mother of the child.

Nature and degree of contact with the child.

Short-comings of adolescent parenthood.

What is a father, what am I?

Future relationship with the child, constraints and complications.

Dealing with possible compromises of my life, the child's life

Who comes first, father and baby, or an adolescent.

How is it different or similar to my own childhood.

Would you recommend it, why or why not.

Effects of having the baby upon my family/whanau/aiga.

What do you think are the important concerns people have over having children at your age.

How would you respond to them?

### **Stage three.**

Giving refund to participant to cover travel expenses to the value of \$10.

Clarification of participants feelings/experience of the interview.

Clarification as to their needs for a support person.

Conclusion and thanks.

## **Appendix F: Summary of Results for Participants.**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

It has been over a year since you made your contribution to my study of Adolescent Fatherhood. I had hoped to have the work finished earlier but having two sons of my own, I was easily distracted. It was a real pleasure to talk with you about your experience of fatherhood. I spoke with 12 young men in total and all made a valuable contribution to the study. There were six key themes which emerged from the study. I list these below.

1: Most participants said becoming a dad made them “grow up”. They were very aware of this when they compared themselves with their friends who had not become fathers. Several participants compared themselves with what they were like before they became dads. They all said how good it was to cease wasting their lives and do something important, namely take care of their children.

2: Many participants reported life as a young father could be tough. Having to work long hours, having to give up socializing and messing about with mates. They said being a dad was good, but it was also more work than they ever thought.

3: Some of the young fathers reported they felt they had two personalities at times. One was the responsible father who spent his time taking care of his family, the other was like a young teenager who wanted to break loose. They reported at times they had to consider which one was going to be in-charge of their lives.

4: A lot of participants said they wanted to bring their son or daughter up better than they were brought up. They said they had strong goals about how life should be for their child. And they wanted their child to have the best things in life.

5: Many participants said being a father was the most wonderful thing in their life, but they don't recommend doing it in your teenage years. None of the participants regretted

becoming a father. However, most said things could have been better if they had waited till they were a little older before having a child.

6: A very common feature which nearly all participants mentioned was that becoming a father meant becoming responsible. They spoke about how being a dad meant you had to put up with things you didn't like, like working long hours, or not having much money . And it also meant you had to give up things you did like, things such as sport and drinking and hanging about with mates. Many said being a dad meant being responsible.

Once again, many thanks for participating in the research. It was a pleasure to meet you and listen to you talk about your family. I wish you and your family all the best.

Yours sincerely

Gareth Rouch

**Appendix G: Transcription notation.**

- [ ] empty brackets signal that material has been omitted in the transcript
- [ex-girlfriend] square brackets contain an explanation when clarification is required.
- [ing] square brackets may also be used to indicate adjustment of grammar for the purpose of readability.
- (inaudible) Rounded brackets indicate that the comment was inaudible or there is doubt about the accuracy of the comment.

See Parker (1992) and Potter & Wetherell (1987) and for a discussion on transcription conventions see Atkinson & Heritage (1984).

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