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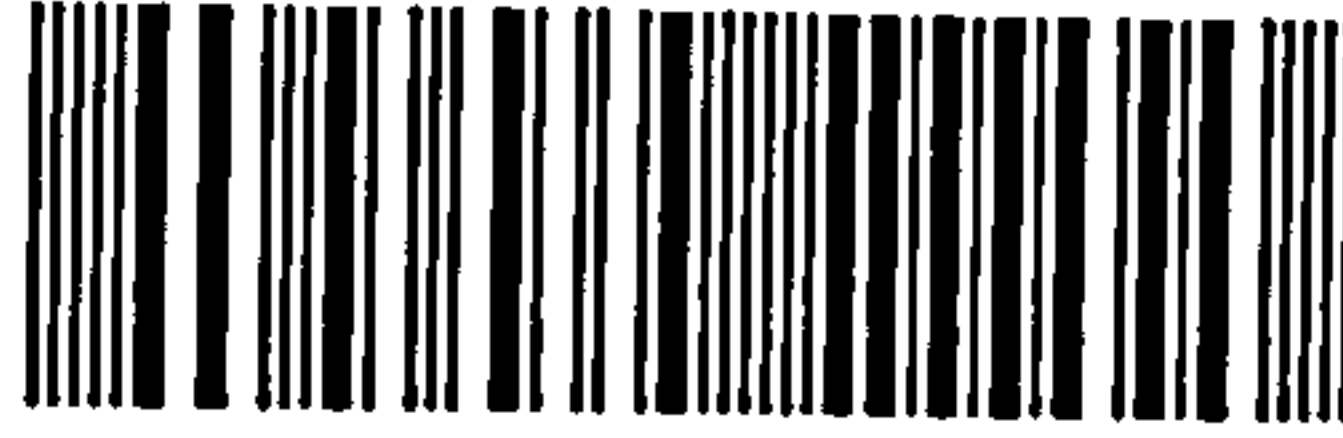
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'You've got to keep your head on'

**A study of the stories young male service users tell
about the transition to fatherhood.**

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Research on disadvantaged young fathers has been minimally addressed in the literature, particularly in the UK and especially with young men who are service users. This thesis, drawing on discourse theory, explores the descriptions of 16 white, socially excluded young men, aged 15-24, on the transition to fatherhood. The findings from the study, which uses a narrative methodological approach, indicate common themes from the stories of the young fathers, especially with regard to the high levels of disadvantage and social exclusion they had been exposed to, and the anti-social behaviour they described engaging in, prior to the birth of their child/ren. A significant proportion of young men, however, reported how important fatherhood had been in transforming their attitudes and behaviour and how they took their responsibilities as fathers seriously. In addition, the data details the social support systems which are described as being important to them (including some professional support) and the types of activities they describe engaging in as fathers. The study also argues for transparency in research processes with hard to reach young people and the importance of using a reflexive approach, particularly regarding the biographical and professional influences the researcher brings to the study.

For my mother, Joan Elizabeth ~ for a life time of love

*For my brother, Hugh James (17.10.52~22.2.06) ~ for a battle so
courageously fought, right to the very end. You are missed.*

With thanks to my family:

With thanks and love to my husband Derek, for understanding and providing support in every possible way. To Richard James with love, thank you for reminding me that Manchester United is a far more interesting a topic of conversation than teenage pregnancy (!) and for 'doing boy' in your own special way. To Charlotte, with love, thank you for your sense of humour, emergency shopping trips and reminding me how to re-position myself as a mum at the end of every day. To Isabelle, my princess, thank you for making me smile. Good luck in your aim to be a mermaid who helps Cheetahs in Africa. Fantastic!

With thanks to my friends who have listened to me with (apparent) interest over the years, you know who you are, and who have read and commented on my work.

Beyond thanks to Dr. Martin Robb and Dr. Danielle Turney, for your time, patience, understanding and commitment. Thank you.

Thanks to Professor Bornat for listening.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis gives an account of young fathers who are users of the statutory social services in the UK. It has materialized from the recognition that research involving young fathers is limited in the UK, especially in comparison to young mothers (Swann *et al* 2003; SEU 1999, 2004). As working in partnership with vulnerable young parents has increased in recent years, through statutory agencies and organizations such as Sure Start, it has been acknowledged that dedicated studies, which specifically focus on young fathers who are service users, are lacking (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001; O'Brien 2004). This study addresses this gap and describes a research project into the lives of white, working-class young men who have made the transition to fatherhood early, whilst also being users of social services. It involves data from interviews with 16, young men aged between 15 and 24 who, at the time of interview were, or were about to become fathers. All were users of the statutory social services in the UK, living in Kent and either receiving services in their own right, for example as young offenders, or as clients of a particular team or family centre, or their child was receiving a voluntary or compulsory service. Thus, although their source of referral to the study and the basis of their involvement with social services differed, they all shared the status of being or about to become young parents as well as being users of social services.

Background to the study

As a qualified social worker in the early 1990's I worked with vulnerable young people in care. Increasingly, I became aware that many of the young women on my case load were becoming pregnant and leaving the care system as parents. Research at the time (Biehal and Wade 1996; Corlyon and McGure 1997) was establishing a link between leaving the care system and becoming a teenage mother and I became interested in researching the reasons behind this trend. I consequently embarked upon an MPhil. researching young women who became mothers whilst in care (Reeves 2003).

On a wider scale it became apparent, with the introduction of the Social Exclusion Unit in 1999, that young mothers generally were to be the focus of a great deal of research and debate. Direct research with young fathers, however, although in existence (Simms and Smith 1986; Hudson and Ineichen 1991) has been rather more limited and has evolved as often being presented from the perspective of the young mother (Corlyon and McGuire 1997).

Drawing on social welfare discourses it is argued by Cavanagh and Cree (1996) and Bowl (2001) that social welfare is not gender neutral and there are still stereotypical perceived boundaries between men and women, particularly in relation to caring, professional intervention and the provision of services. Analysis of social work literature indicates the maternal focus of much family casework, with the perspective of the man or

father in a family often sidelined or described negatively, rather than them being seen as a positive contributor or service user in their own right (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001; Featherstone 2003; O'Brien 2004). It is claimed by O'Brien (2004) that the majority of fathers are absent from interactions between their families and social services, creating distance between men and statutory intervention. In addition, Daniel and Taylor (1999, 2001) argue that until fairly recently the perspectives of fathers have been largely ignored. Moreover, as the literature review in Chapter One will argue, there is also very little data on *young* fathers who are parents and service users, particularly from their perspective.

Young fathers are also young men and are making the transition to adulthood as well as the transition to fatherhood. As the research for this thesis progressed, I became increasingly interested in drawing on some of the literature which looks at how the change from adolescence to adulthood in contemporary society is theorized and explained, and looking at how young men describe dealing with the discourses of young masculinity and young fatherhood.

Evidence drawn from Parrott (2002) and the Social Exclusion Unit (Social Exclusion Unit 2004) indicates that individuals who use social services are more likely to be working-class and exposed to factors associated with social exclusion, including a prevalence of inter-linked, negative factors in their lives. Young people from areas of increased deprivation often have complex needs which require inter-professional or inter-agency approaches. The recent Government report, *Transitions: Young Adults with*

Complex Needs (2005) identifies that some young adults have not benefited from public services and that they are often excluded or exclude themselves from such services. The report highlights that the transition to adulthood is particularly difficult if you have to deal with inter-linked social problems; being a parent further complicates this picture. The young men in the study for this thesis were likely to be experiencing a working-class, socially excluded transition to both adulthood and fatherhood and I wanted to explore how the young men 'storied' and described these events.

Aims of the study

Acknowledging the lack of literature on young fathers who are users of social services, the initial research aims of this study were to identify a group of young, working-class fathers and facilitate their representations of the transition to fatherhood, evaluating their descriptions of how this event was woven into the wider narratives of their lives.

Specifically, the initial aims were to investigate:

1. If becoming a young father leads to a renegotiation of their identities and described behaviour.
2. What strategies they describe using, if any, to renegotiate their identities and described behaviour.
3. The areas of strain and help in this process.
4. The resources they use during this process, including familial and professional resources and how they describe using them.

When considering the methodological approach of the study I noted that a significant amount of previous research with young parents had tended to use semi-structured interviews (Corlyon and McGuire 1997; Allen and Dowling 1998; Tabberer *et al* 2000). Appreciating this I decided to use a different approach, drawing on narrative methodologies whereby participants are encouraged to 'story' their experiences (Gergen 1994; Reissman 1993, 1994, 2001, 2003). In choosing a methodology with an emphasis on the individuals' self-construction through language, I was interested in how young fathers framed and described their experiences. This approach also connected clearly with the emerging theoretical framework of the study, the use of a discursive approach, accepting that beliefs and practices are historically and socially constructed and that individuals position themselves (and are situated by others) within and between discourses.

In relation to the use of narrative methodologies, as the study progressed an additional focus, although not necessarily borne out in research (Frosh *et al* 2002), was that of exploring the stereotype of the uncommunicative teenage boy, unable or unwilling to express his feelings, emotions or experiences. I became interested in examining the factors in the interview situation which may prohibit and encourage a young man telling his story. Consequently the choice of a *narrative* approach with young fathers provided two further aims for the research, to:

5. Explore narrative methodological approaches with young fathers who are service users and to evaluate if this approach has implications for the outcomes the research.
6. Undertake a reflexive approach in the research process analysing the co-construction of the interviews.

Key elements in the study

From the six aims identified above, several key elements emerged which became integral to the research and have affected how the thesis has been written. This section briefly introduces these key elements including reflexivity, the use of a research diary, making ethical judgments in the field, narrative interviews, the use of a discursive theoretical framework, social exclusion and the way masculinity and fatherhood are interpreted throughout the study.

As the aims of the study set out, this thesis is about listening to how working-class, young men narrate their experiences of the transition to fatherhood. However, it is also an account about my development as a researcher and, as the study progressed, reflexivity about my role and contribution to the study became an integral part of the thesis. Reflexivity is argued by D'Cruz and Jones (2004) to be a process whereby researchers are concerned with the 'constructedness' of all knowledge claims and our part in it, requiring researchers to 'consider how power is exercised in knowledge making processes' and to continually scrutinize their own actions (2004:11).

Undertaking this reflexive approach has been, at times, a difficult and uncomfortable process as it involved dissecting my words and behaviour during a process, under close scrutiny. As the study progressed the process outlined below by D’Cruz and Jones became increasingly pertinent to me as a researcher:

..research practice necessitates the interpretation and reconstruction of principles amid competing imperatives, occurring within complicated and contradictory social contexts that more often than not render simple rule following redundant.

(D’Cruz and Jones 2004:11)

Although in most research projects the role and function of gatekeepers, the ethical framework, confidentiality and context of the research are important, in this study, where gaining access to participants was problematic, these factors developed a heightened significance, primarily due to the vulnerable group of young people I was working with, and I increasingly reflected on my part in their development. For example, as Walmsley (1998) argues, negotiating with gatekeepers can be complex, particularly when navigating access to vulnerable people. Whilst negotiating access to the young men in this study, I became aware of my lack of power in the gatekeeping process. Whilst identifying participants for the study individual social workers, applying my criteria, used their knowledge to select who was a ‘suitable’ participant and I wanted the opportunity in the thesis to consider this process. In addition, as the interviews began I wanted to reflect on my role in the interactions with the young fathers. Therefore, to facilitate reflexivity on the process and my role, both during the

active research phase of the study and beyond, I kept a **research diary**. This diary was used as a practical resource to record the date and place of each interview and how I had been referred to a young father, as well as a medium to record my thoughts and emotions during the research process, helping me ultimately to situate and interpret the data.

I became increasingly influenced by the writings of Doucet and Mauthner (2002) and their approach to knowing and researching responsibly, including the importance of transparency in research processes. Part of this transparency for me was reflecting on the practice of making decisions about issues arising from working with the young fathers. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that researchers must sometimes make and react to the unexpected situations they are presented with and make **judgments in context**. Of significance is that the judgments made should be continually updated and regarded as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off decision prior to the research commencing. The term therefore evolved, in the context of this study, to mean that although difficult situations with the young fathers could not be predicted, they needed to be responded to in an ethical and reflexive way, making the best judgment at the time and discussed within the framework of the research.

A further key element in the study is the use of **narrative interviews** with the participants. As Chapter Two highlights, narrative interviews have the key components of a story, a plot and characters which are positioned by the teller (Denzin 2000). Consequently, it was important that the participants in the study were willing to talk,

recount events and position characters from their lives. However, it was apparent as the study progressed that the young fathers varied in their responses in the interview and I became increasingly interested in reflecting on possible reasons for this, including the context and environment of the interview. In addition, what also became a matter for consideration was my role: namely, how I intervened with a young father and how my biographical background shaped the interaction and the nature of the knowledge generated. Reflection on this process forms a substantial part of Chapter Four.

Discourse is an element which informs both the theoretical and methodological paradigms of this study. Discourse is an often overused and under-defined term (Parker 1990; Potter *et al* 1990). However, its use in this study is twofold. Firstly, it provides the theoretical background to the thesis. Borrowing heavily from Foucault's definition, discourses are understood as networks of historical representations, constructed through language and which serve to regulate social practices (Weedon 1987). Using this definition discourses are seen as representing knowledge about specific topics, for example masculinity and fatherhood, at particular historical moments, as the products of ongoing meaning and dependent upon the interaction of contemporary knowledge, language and power. Secondly, discourse is interpreted as being concerned with language and social practices (Hall 2001) which are invariably bound up with each other (Edley 2001).

Applying these two strands to the study offers the possibility of looking at how individuals construct, position and move within and between discourses. This is

invariably a complex process open to individual interpretation; however, by encouraging individuals to 'story' their experiences they will have the opportunity to describe a snapshot of their lives in which they position themselves and others, and portray the social practices and social relationships they engage in. A central concept in the thesis is the idea that narrating experiences enables individual identities to be described and to remain fluid, adapting to settings and contexts and negotiating with others. Masculine identities are interpreted in this way, concurring with Edley's (2001:194) definition of masculinity as 'a messy and complicated co-production fashioned through social interaction, subject to negotiation and inextricably bound up with the exercise of power' and existing within contemporary discourses. Analysis of literature pertaining to young, white working-class masculinities highlights the essentially problematised nature of available discourses for this group (Frosh *et al* 2002; Stephen and Squires 2003; McDowell 2001) potentially limiting the positions available for them to take up. Moreover, connected to this essentially negative portrayal of working-class young men is the literature associated with young fatherhood, which often presents young fathers as transitory influences in the lives of their children (SEU 1999) not directly involved in their care (Allen and Dowling 1998). In addition, within social work, direct research with young fathers is under-represented (Tyrer *et al* 2005) and this lack of literature combines with the essentially negative discourses on fatherhood generally (Featherstone 2003), which often portray fathers as risks or no use to their families. A discursive framework, therefore, enables the identification and exploration of dominant contemporary representations of young,

white, working-class masculinities and young fatherhood and enables, through interviews, their descriptions of their worlds to be explored.

A further key element in the thesis is **social exclusion**. Although it is acknowledged that there are many definitions of social exclusion and many complex debates within it (see for example the debate in Hills *et al* 2002), I have used the definition proposed by the UK Labour government throughout this study, as it emphasises elements associated with being a user of social services:

Social exclusion happens when people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown. When such problems combine they can create a vicious cycle. Social exclusion can happen as a result of problems that face one person in their life. But it can also start from birth. Being born into poverty or to parents with low skills still has a major influence on future life chances.

(Social Exclusion Unit 2003)

This contemporary definition emphasises the *links* for individuals between complex and often entrenched social problems which may have been with them from birth. It also emphasises the concept of disadvantage which is associated with the young fathers who form the focus of this study. It is well documented that individuals who use social services are more likely to be exposed to and suffer from combinations of the social problems outlined in the quotation above (and also see Parrott 2002) and for this reason the young men in this study were considered to be particularly **vulnerable**. They were

not only poor and working-class but they had also been exposed to social exclusion in their lives through having experienced some or all of the following; fragmented family relationships, being care leavers, young offenders and young parents as well as, for some, being exposed to drug use. All of the 16 participants portray in their stories how they were currently or had in the past been exposed to a series of 'joined up' complex problems (Social Exclusion Unit 2003).

How the thesis is organized

The thesis is approximately 95,000 words long (including appendices) and has seven main chapters which are each sub-divided into sections. Each chapter has a specific focus, which is outlined in a brief introductory section along with an explanation on how the chapter is organized. Outlined below are brief overviews of each chapter giving a flavour of the overall thesis.

The first chapter provides a literature review and highlights key concepts relating to making the transition to fatherhood as a white, working-class young man in contemporary UK society. Firstly, the chapter reviews some of the themes and dominant discourses in the transition literature in relation to young people and working-class young men. The focus of the literature is predominately concerned with white, working-class young men as this represents the participants in the study. However it is acknowledged that there are other transition experiences for black, Asian, middle class, homosexual and female young people. The chapter then moves on to analyse research on young fathers and there is a

discussion of the findings in the area of social work studies with young fathers, both in the UK and US. It is acknowledged in this chapter that there is a vast amount of research, particularly on young people during transition, as well as a high volume of studies focusing on young parents. The chapter negotiates a path through these studies, drawing on wider debates in the literature, evaluating terminology, features and highlighting key themes.

Chapter Two sets out the theoretical structure for the thesis and has two main parts. The first section argues how a **discursive perspective** offers a constructive framework for the analysis of the stories of young, socially excluded fathers. Drawing on contemporary discourses of masculinity (Edley and Wetherell 1997) youth (Raby 2002) and young men (Frosh *et al* 2002; Mac An Ghail 1994), and current perspectives on men within social work (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001) it is argued that contemporary societal discourses regulate how young people generally and working-class, white young men specifically are thought about. It is argued that these varying, sometimes negative perspectives limit the options available to men who become young fathers and the chapter looks at theories which explain opportunities for individual agency and positioning (Harre and Van Langenhove 1999). Drawing on the importance of language in discourse the chapter moves on to argue that through the use of **narrative interviews** (Reissman 1993, 1994, 2001, 2003) opportunities exist to examine how individuals, in this case young men making the transition to fatherhood, 'story' their experiences and construct and reconstruct their individual identities (Gergen 1994).

Chapter Three sets out how the **research study was conducted**. This includes details of the participants (Figure 3.) and the features of the study, for example, how access to the young men was negotiated, how the young men were identified, the gate keeping processes (Figure 1), the process of informed consent (Figure 2) and issues of confidentiality. Furthermore, the ways in which the interviews were conducted, the context of the interviews and how the data was analysed are also discussed.

Chapter Four is the first of the findings chapters and relates to research aims five and six and also to the key element of **reflexivity** previously identified. The chapter examines issues of process and ethics relating to research with a particularly disadvantaged group of young men. It also comments on the narrative approach used in the study and highlights issues which emerged from conducting the study in the way that I did. For example, several factors including targeting socially excluded young men, using a narrative approach, the interview contexts and the personal biography I brought to the research, are explored in relation to the knowledge produced in the interviews. These factors are analysed and set out in this chapter to contextualize the findings discussed in Chapters Five and Six

Chapter Five, the second of the findings chapters (relating to research aims one, two and three), sets out the similar ways in which some of young men told their **stories of the transition to fatherhood**. In their stories these young men described three clear phases in their lives so far: recklessness, rescue and responsibility. Initially their descriptions of the activities in which they were involved during early adolescence, including anti-social and

risky behaviour as well as offending, are considered. As the literature review highlights (Chapter One) this is not a particularly new theme in transition research, particularly in relation to young working-class, socially excluded young men. However, what emerges as new in terms of social work research in this chapter are the descriptions the young men give of two additional, positive phases following this initial period of recklessness and directly related to becoming a young father: rescue and responsibility. In the first of these (rescue) the young men describe how, through falling in love with their current partner and by becoming fathers, they have moved on from their previous anti-social or criminal ways. In addition, the young men go on to portray how they now consider themselves to be in a phase beyond this where they describe how responsible they now are.

Using the narratives of all 16 participants, Chapter Six sets out how the young fathers position themselves and others in terms of **support**, including how they describe using support and critical relationships and other resources available to them (research aims two and four) and how they are agents of support themselves. Specifically, the findings highlight how they describe their identities as fathers being influenced by their partners, members of their biological families, their partners' families and **professional discourses**. It is through the sometimes distressing stories told by the young men in this chapter that the strains of being a young father are also identified (research aim three). Chapter Seven draws together all the main strands of this study and reflects on the implications of the findings for future research

Finally, and on a personal note, in order to contextualise the study and exemplify the vulnerability of some young parents, I have included below part of a story contained in a letter to a young father, not interviewed for the study, given to me by him for my research. Although written by a young woman, the significance of the letter for me is that it encapsulates many of the pressures and feelings that being fifteen and about to become a young parent can have.

Dear Jude,

We have got ourselves in a bit of trouble but this baby is what I want more than anything. You know I love you so so much and I would do anything for you. I am trying to cut down on smoking I've only had 1 and it's 2.30 so I am trying. But please tell me if you want to get rid of the baby, I would do it for you. We will have it for the rest of our lives but we will be together for ever anyway, won't we. It means so much to me when we have sex it ain't just a bit of fun in my eyes. I'm going to have to have to do a test so we know for sure but I really do think I am. I will be so upset if I ain't because I want your baby. Please write back babe.

Love you so

fucking much

Tanya

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.0. INTRODUCTION

There is a vast amount of research, data, literature and academic comment on young people, particularly in the contemporary arena (see Dennison and Coleman 2000; Coleman and Hendry 2004; Roche *et al* 2004 for comprehensive coverage). Recent debate has tended to focus on environmental factors impacting on the development of young people during the transition to adulthood; for example social, political, economic, educational, cultural, class, gender, disability and family factors. A variety, or all, of these factors may interrelate for an individual young person, providing them with a unique transition experience. As Dennison and Coleman (2000) suggest:

..the teenage years are especially important ones for young women and men. Experiences in these years will have a major effect on the life course, will determine to what extent individuals are able to realise their full potential. These years are also when some adolescents are particularly vulnerable. It is essential therefore, to understand fully the nature of this vulnerability.

(Dennison and Coleman 2000:2)

Young men who become fathers whilst making this journey to adulthood would seem to be in a position of additional vulnerability as, not only are they going through a

possibly difficult and uneven process on their own account, but they are also dealing with the complexities of the transition to fatherhood. As the Introduction noted, in recent years, there has tended to be a focus on the experiences and needs of young mothers (SEU 1999, 2004; Swann *et al* 2003; Allen and Dowling 1998; Tabberer *et al* 2000). Indeed, as this literature review will argue, *young* fathers and their experiences are currently under-represented in the literature and research (Swann *et al* 2003; Rosato *et al* 2004) particularly when they have complex needs (SEU 2005) including poor educational achievement, unemployment and are users of the statutory social services. This study, by exploring the narratives of young men who become fathers, aims to overcome this.

The purpose of this chapter is to negotiate a path through the array of contemporary research on young people, with the specific focus of drawing on the literature which impacts upon the process of becoming a young father and a service user. Arguably, becoming a young father who is also a user of social services would suggest three main areas of literature which would shape the chapter: research on being a young man, the literature on being a young father, and also research which looks at being a young father who uses the statutory social services in the UK. Indeed, young men are a part of the transition literature, which looks at contemporary, heterogeneous experiences of moving between childhood and adulthood in the UK, and they are also part of the literature on young parents. In addition, within these broad areas are also issues of culture and ethnicity as well as issues of caring and support within families. Consequently this large chapter has five main sections. Firstly, it will broadly review recent transition literature and evaluate the influence of differing factors relating to being a white, working-class teenage boy. Secondly, it will examine some emerging

themes from identified 'fast track' transitions from childhood to adulthood (Jones 2003), for example being a young carer, a care leaver and becoming a young parent. The third section will set out and critically analyse research specifically relating to becoming a young father and fourthly, contextualise this data with emerging social work research perspectives on young fathers. A final section will evaluate the findings and perspectives of the reviewed literature, synthesizing the main points to be taken forward to both the theoretical and research chapters of this thesis.

1.1. Some features and findings of recent transition research

Young people have long been the subject of public concern, and tend to be seen as problematic (Gillies et al 2001).

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, there is a large volume of research which looks at issues of transition for young people in contemporary UK society and this literature, arguably, impacts upon the study of young fathers. Prior to reviewing this transition literature, however, the section below will briefly reflect on some features of the research referred to in this chapter which generally, but not exclusively, focuses on smaller scale studies. The section will then move on to look at some of the recent findings from transition literature.

1.1.1. Some features of transition research.

Some transition literature focuses on the views of young people whilst other contributions adopt a broader perspective and include the views of their parents. The

inclusion of parents in qualitative transition research is, arguably, an under-used feature of research with young people and potentially offers the opportunity for different perspectives of transition 'stories'. For example Gillies *et al* (2001) in their research interviewed 32 young people aged 16-18, and a number of parents of teenage children (including 31 fathers and 30 mothers) with the aim of understanding how 'parents and teenagers experience and make sense of their lives together' (Gillies *et al* 2001: 1). The research offered the opportunity to view perspectives presented by both parents and young people on similar issues. By including the viewpoints of mothers and fathers, the study was able to claim that mothers and fathers have differing perspectives on the transition experiences of young people. One of the limitations of the study, however, was that not all of the parents interviewed were from the same families as the young people; indeed only 14 were, thus diluting the family connectedness of the study.

Another feature of smaller scale transition research is the gender balance of participants. As Dennison and Coleman (2000) highlight, there is still a lack of research relating to how gender 'impacts upon young people in their entirety' during adolescence (2000:11). There is a significant literature which considers the experiences of young women during adolescence; for example young women were the subjects of research in the 1980s in the work of Sue Lees (1986, 1993), and more recently Dennison and Coleman (2000) have analysed literature relating to gender for the Women's Unit, looking at a range of data on adolescence and evaluating the significance of gender during the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, interest in the high rates of teenage pregnancy in the UK (recent statistics indicate that just under 40,000 young women under the age of 18 became pregnant in 2003 (DFES 2004)

have produced many studies on the causes and experiences of becoming a teenage mother (Phoenix 1991; SEU 1999, 2004; Tabberer *et al* 2000; Swann *et al* 2003).

More recently attention has turned to the experiences of being a young man in contemporary society (Mac An Ghail 1994; Frosh *et al* 2001; Lloyd and Forrest 2001), looking in detail at issues such as the increase in levels of suicide amongst young men (Frosh *et al* 2001), how young men act out and adapt their masculine identities (Mac An Ghail 1994; Frosh *et al* 2001), and how under-achievement in education and unemployment relates particularly to working-class young men (Dennison and Coleman 2000).

Some qualitative studies on transition include the views of both young men and young women (Johnston *et al* 2000), although in the case of Gillies *et al* (2001) where the research is disseminated on the internet (Joseph Rowntree Foundation), it is not always easy to assess the proportions of young men and young women interviewed and how the claims from the research relate to both genders.

The research of Johnston *et al* (2000), based upon qualitative interviews with working-class young people (61 young men and 37 young women aged 15-25) looked at 'the ways in which young people grow up and get by in the context of social exclusion' (2000:1). Their study included a larger number of young men than young women. On the one hand this can be seen as a positive development, with studies increasingly representing of the views of young men. However, the inclusion of a high number of young men could reflect the problematisation of young men and

perhaps they are over- represented in a study focusing upon exclusion and disadvantage as they may be more likely to be influenced by these negative factors. There is often a lack of clarity regarding why young women and young men are represented in the proportions they are in transition studies and a lack of clear analysis regarding how findings may impact on the genders. Lloyd and Forrest (2001) comment on how few transition studies take into account gender as a variable:

We have been surprised to find how rarely gender is mentioned both in quantitative and qualitative studies. This was particularly surprising when we looked at conditions such as suicide, where statistically the incidences, methods and causes are, at least in part, gender driven. Too often studies appear to be unable to take into account more than one variable, so if they address age, then gender and race...retreat into the background.

(Lloyd and Forrest 2001:52)

A third characteristic of some qualitative transition research is the age range of the young people included, with a lack of agreement on who qualifies as a 'young person'. In the study by Johnston *et al* (2000), their study included interviews with young people aged between 15 and 25, whilst Gillies *et al* (2001) limited their study to young people between 16 and 18. Research by Barry (2001) (although including both young men and young women) considered a broader age span. These variations may have implications for how the research is presented, disseminated and used and in any analysis of transition literature the boundaries of the term 'young person' need careful consideration. Indeed the 'rationale' for the age range of the young fathers in the study reported in this thesis is discussed in Chapter Three.

Finally, in this brief review of some of the features of qualitative research with young people, the nature of the methodology used in studies with young people requires analysis. Many of the studies referred to above used semi-structured interviews in their study design. However, recent research by Thomson *et al* (2002) described using biographical interviews. They argue that rather than using approaches of some other youth transition research which 'have tended to privilege social categories over the subjective experience of social change' (2002:337), their own technique is particularly suited to the contemporary nature of transition experiences, particularly when looking at risk:

In a changing social context, where transitions and status passages are not simply linear, but are becoming characterised by synchronicity (the co-occurrence of events) and reversibility. The development of new methods that allow us to explore how individuals confront and negotiate risk becomes increasingly useful. Biographical and life history methods are particularly suited to these tasks.

(Thomson *et al* 2002:351)

Thomson *et al* maintain that one of the strengths of their biographical approach is that it is an effective means of 'capturing the complexity of individual lives' (Thomson *et al* 2002:332). In a similar vein the approach used in my study was to encourage young fathers to 'story' their experiences and to capture their representations of their lives about an event which is often problematised in society (SEU 1999).

In this brief review, some of the complexities of transition research have been highlighted and I would argue that it is important for these points to be taken into account in order to contextualise findings. Indeed, where appropriate, noteworthy characteristics of age, gender and methodology will be analysed in the studies referred to throughout this thesis.

1.1.2. Some findings of recent transition literature

Broadly speaking, recent transition literature has highlighted a number of significant characteristics. For example, it is argued that the transition period has extended in comparison to previous generations (Jones 2003; Raffo and Reeves 2000); is increasingly 'non-linear and heterogeneous' (Thomson *et al* 2002:335; Stephen and Squires 2003); can be a 'fast track' experience for some (Jones 2003); can be impacted and complicated by exposure to social exclusion, deprivation and poverty (Jones 2003; Johnston *et al* 2000; SEU 2005) as well as gender and ethnicity (Dennison and Coleman 2000), enhanced by positive support networks (Gillies *et al* 2001; Raffo and Reeves 2000) and changed by 'critical moments' (Thomson *et al* 2002). These factors are complex and often interlinked. As MacDonald and Marsh observe:

Numerous accounts have plotted how young people – differentiated by social class, gender, ethnicity, locality and education – follow different paths during the late teenage years.

(MacDonald and Marsh 2005:31)

The section below will consider some of these complexities, briefly analyse research findings and critically evaluate their impact on the transition experiences of young men.

1.1.3. 'Fast' and 'slow' track transitions

As stated above, the transition period from childhood to adulthood is now generally considered to be a heterogeneous experience (Thomson *et al* 2002; Jones 2003; Raffo and Reeves 2000) and an extended one for middle-class young people, with research suggesting they often have a slower route to adulthood, thus extending their period of dependence upon their parents (Jones 2003). Reasons suggested for the variety of transition experiences include the diversification of educational experience and alterations to the youth labour market, resulting in the limitation of employment opportunities for some young people (Jones 2003). Jones argues that a consequence of these changes has been to encourage some groups of teenagers to stay on in education. However, she argues that the outcomes for young men who do not stay on a school, go on to further or higher education or get a job (or NEET – 'not in education, employment or training' MacDonald and Marsh 2005:26) are that they are increasingly unable to access routes to independence. Jones explains:

Many of the jobs typically held by school leavers have disappeared... There are now few work alternatives to educational success. This has particularly affected those without qualifications and from low-income households.

(Jones 2003:3)

Drawing her data from the findings of 26 separate projects on young people, Jones argues that with the lack of employment opportunities, particularly for those who are poor, educational success increases in significance. However, despite increases in the take-up of further and higher education amongst middle-class young people she argues that 'some working-class young people are still missing out' (2003:3).

Dennison and Coleman (2000) identify that young men are less likely to stay on in education than young women, especially young men who achieve poor GCSE results (Payne 1998). Indeed Stephen and Squires maintain that young men without 'qualifications and skills face the greatest insecurities' (2003:147) in contemporary society.

This would not seem to be the case for young, working-class women, especially with changes and expansion in the health and social care sector offering gender-specific opportunities in caring roles (McDowell 2001). McDowell points out that young men are often not considered suitable employees in the service and care sectors, which often depend on 'personal contact with customers and clients, good manners and a clean appearance, careful attention to detail and deferential attitudes' (2001:1).

Appreciating these points Jones (2003) argues that there has been a 'polarisation' in transition experiences:

While for many the pathways to adulthood are getting longer, for others adulthood comes early. The result is the polarisation of experience in youth. At one end some young people are still leaving school at the minimum age, still becoming parents while in their teens[...]. These 'fast track' transitions are becoming more distinctive,

more problematic and more stigmatised when the increasingly middle-class majority is deferring entry into the labour market and into marriage and childbearing until later.

(Jones 2003:2)

Thomson *et al* (2002) make the point that, not only can the phase between adolescence and adulthood be protracted or fragmented in work and education, but it can also be a complex mixture of dependence and independence in other aspects of life, for example relationships, housing, training, family circumstances, peer and consumer factors. This point is also made by Raffo and Reeves (2000) who suggest that although there may be features which young people are exposed to, or from which they are protected, there is no 'normative' model of adolescence and transition to adulthood.

Arguably, the limited availability and lack of affordability of housing has also affected the ability of young people to move towards achieving greater autonomy and independence. As Oldman (2004) remarks this has either forced a young person to remain with their family, or pushed them out of the parental home inappropriately into substandard housing or homelessness. Whilst remaining with the family elongates the period of dependency, and for some young people and this may be positive, leaving home at an early age is associated with increased risks, for example by pressurising them on to the streets and into dangers including crime and drug related incidents. Dennison and Coleman (2000) and Lloyd and Forrest (2001) highlight that homelessness is a problem which is increasingly affecting young men. Looking at possible causes of this, they argue that young men are more likely to leave home due

to violent incidents in the home, theft from parents or police involvement (Dennison and Coleman 2000; Smith *et al* 1999). Furthermore, Jones (1995) argues that change within families and specifically the increasing number of step-families, acts as a precipitating factor for young men to leave the family home, often as a result of conflict with the (male) step-parent.

Thus, traditional linear routes to independence and adulthood through employment education and housing have become increasingly difficult for some young people to attain, particularly working-class young men, and this may have implications for their transition experiences and the support they are offered.

As young fathers and as service users, the participants interviewed for the study discussed in this thesis are more vulnerable to experiencing a working-class 'fast track' (Jones 2003) socially excluded transition period (Parrott 2002) as their class location makes them more vulnerable to leaving education at an early age and having limited employment options (Williamson 1997; Stephen and Squires 2003; MacDonald and Marsh 2005). The focus of the next section is to analyse research findings which address these fast-track, socially-excluded transition experiences for working-class young men.

1.1.4. Constructions of young, white, working-class masculinities

Perhaps the most influential study of working-class transition experiences for young men is Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour*. (1977). The principal features of the study included the importance of a 'lad' identity, the ability to have a 'laff' and indulge in seemingly high status activities such as drinking and heterosexual sex. In contrast,

learning and conforming to school rules and aims were rejected by the working-class young men as being 'cissy', whereas replicating a form of masculinity associated with working-class manual labour and toughness were valued. Although influential, Willis' work has, however, been criticised for its 'idealised' and romantic view of working-class boys (see Frosh *et al* 2002).

The importance of Willis' work was in establishing the peer group as an influential factor in the lives of working-class young men. Mac An Ghail's (1994) more recent study on young male peer-group cultures in secondary schools, rather than over-emphasising class, identifies how factors of gender, race and sexuality interact in the formation of masculinities. Non-conformity to school work, rather than being perceived as a working-class group resistance as in Willis' work, is theorised by Mac An Ghail as being influenced by social and sexual factors. The 'macho' working-class lads rejected the three R's, opting for the three F's instead; 'fighting, fucking and football' (1994:56). Mac An Ghail outlines how academic achievement was disparaged, feminised and sexualised by this group, with those who did achieve being referred to as 'dickhead achievers'. Mac An Ghail further argues that masculine identities are increasingly being constructed in a 'climate of rapid socio-economic change' (1994:68). This links this to the point made earlier that transition experiences are increasingly heterogeneous for contemporary young people. He remarks:

In short, we are witnessing highly disorganised and fractured post compulsory school transitions, with large sections of white and black young people learning 'not to labour'.

(Mac An Ghail 1994:68)

There is a wide agreement in recent research regarding the way in which some constructions of young masculinity have been problematised, indicating a crisis for some young men (Frosh *et al* 2002; McDowell 2001; MacDonald and Marsh 2005). A great deal of the concern focuses on a perceived increase in anti-social behaviour, delinquency (Stephen and Squires 2003), sexual abuse perpetration (Frosh *et al* 2002) and poor educational attainment (McDowell 2001), as well as an increase in suicide rates for young men (McDowell 2001; Lloyd and Forrest 2001). Indeed, as McQueen and Henwood (2002) highlight, suicide is the second most common cause of death in males aged 15 to 34 in the UK. Set against these factors and further contributing to a problematised discourse are media-induced 'moral panics' regarding male gang culture and violence (Welch *et al* 2002), joy riding (Stephen and Squires 2003) and latterly a binge-drinking culture.

Having highlighted the idea of 'problematised' constructions of young masculinity it is important to clarify two points. Firstly, there are other, more positive constructions of masculine identities during the transition to adulthood and some of these are well represented in the work of Frosh *et al* (2002) and Mac An Ghail (1994), where some transitions are seen as being negotiated with educational success and achievement. Secondly, negotiating a path towards understanding young masculinities is complex for researchers. Frosh *et al* (2001) caution that there is:

..a gap in our current understanding of boys and masculinities is, of complex notions of what it means to 'do boy' in specific contexts, that is, of the multifarious ways in which young masculinities are made.

(Frosh *et al* 2002:3)

This point is emphasised by Lloyd and Forrest (2001) who argue that gender and masculinity are multifaceted factors which affect different groups and individuals within groups at different times and in a variety of different ways. They caution against making too many broad generalisations about young men.

One of the central aims of this thesis, however, is to move closer to understanding how 'doing boy' during the transition to adulthood is negotiated when a young man is also 'doing fatherhood'. As previously pointed out, young men are more likely to be 'doing fatherhood' during adolescence when they are working-class and socially-excluded (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; SEU 1999, 2004; Swann *et al* 2003). As the literature reviewed above notes, working-class transition experiences are more likely to be associated with problematised discourses including under-achievement, fragmented job opportunities, fast track transitions and delinquency (Jones 2003). The section below briefly reviews of some of the key themes associated with problematised discourses on young men and some of these key issues will be taken forward to both the theoretical and empirical sections of the thesis.

1.1.5. Problematised constructions of young masculinity

McDowell's (2001) small-scale qualitative study of 23 predominately working-class young men in the UK provides some insight into the construction of working-class masculine identities. These types of transitions often include experiences of social exclusion. Indeed, many of the young men in McDowell's study were not in paid

work. Those young men who had found jobs were mainly in traditionally masculine areas of employment, working almost exclusively with other men. The young men in her study demonstrated clear ideas about the gender inappropriateness of particular jobs, for example caring and hairdressing. Moreover, their leisure time was described as being divided:

In their out of work lives these young men oscillated between typical 'laddish' behaviour and more responsible behaviour. Many had a clearly gender divided social life, going out with their girlfriend on a Friday or Saturday but definitely not both. One evening was strictly reserved for 'going out with me mates'.

(McDowell 2001:2)

McDowell emphasises one of the key tensions in the life of a young person; the pull and influence of the peer groups and the push of being a couple. Coleman and Hendry (2004) outline how, during adolescence, young people move through differing phases of friendship construction. In early adolescence, young people tend to be drawn into a crowd, within which cliques and friendships develop. Following this, in later adolescence the crowd begins to disintegrate with many young people forming heterosexual couples. Coleman and Hendry (2004) remark that the crowd stage often develops later for young men than young women, perhaps connected to their later social maturity. However, as evidence from Willis (1977) and MacAn Ghail (1994) and McDowell (2001) has made clear, the peer group is often very influential early on in male working-class lives.

Risk taking within and outside of peer groups is also a part of this experience. Lloyd and Forrest (2001) argue that there is 'plenty of evidence to suggest that young men exhibit more risk behaviours and take more risks than young women' (2001:44). Not all commentary on risk-taking is negative. Lloyd and Forrest (2001) highlight that taking risks can be a means to developing self awareness, self-confidence and self-reliance. Generally, however, studies tend to indicate links between risk-taking and the increased involvement of young men from working-class groups. For example, working-class young men tend to smoke 50% more cigarettes than those from middle-class groups and this pattern is repeated for drinking, with working-class young men drinking more and earlier than other groups and young women (Lloyd & Forrest 2001).

In addition, early sexual activity is also associated with working-class membership (Wellings *et al* 1994) and particularly with young men without qualifications who do not live with their parents at the age of 16 (Wellings *et al* 2001). Although reliability can be a factor in this type of data, young men from working-class backgrounds are cited as, on average, having sexual intercourse two years prior to middle-class young men (Wellings *et al* 1994). Moreover, although young people are reputedly using contraceptives more frequently than in the past (Wellings and Mitchell 1998), age and gender seem to be significant influences on this. A young, working-class male is less likely to mention having used contraceptives than a working-class young woman, though both boys and girls are vulnerable to not using contraceptives during the early stages of a relationship (Dennison and Coleman 2000; Wellings *et al* 1994). Explanations for young men's reluctance to use contraceptives vary and include them reporting a reduction in the perception of sexual pleasure through condom use

(Thomson and Holland 1998), as well as the negotiation of intricate power relations between young men and young women during sexual activity (Frost 2001). Frost maintains that young women and young men have a shared perception, based upon dominant gender relations, regarding what is proper and 'normal' in sexual behaviour. The author argues that female passivity is expected in sex, making it difficult for a young woman to refuse sexual advances or take control of contraceptives and/or practise safe sex. Connected to this is the argument that sexual relationships can fulfil different functions for young people. For young women, having unprotected sex can often be commensurate with adult status and being 'in love'. Hooke *et al* (2000) found that young women are generally more concerned with aspects of love and commitment in a relationship and find it hard to separate love and sex. Young men, however, are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour (Mac An Ghail 1994). He summarises some of the threads of this perspective, in his research on gender construction amongst boys in a secondary school:

Most of the young men publicly associated sex exclusively with vaginal penetration [...]. There was an emphasis on the activity of male sex, with little acknowledgement of sharing needs with young women. As female students pointed out, many of the phallogentric young men displayed an obsession with talk of penis size, uncontrollable urges and sexual potency.

(Mac An Ghail 1994:91)

Analysing attitudes towards sexual relationships, Barrowclough (1999) outlines the contrasting ways in which working-class and middle-class boys talk about sexual relationships. In his account, based upon interviews with boys in comprehensive,

grammar and independent schools, Barrowclough cites the attitude of Steve who became a father at 16. Steve attended a comprehensive school and left school with few qualifications:

I was going out with lots of other girls when I was going out with Anna. I didn't really think of her as my girlfriend, although she thought I was her boyfriend. Of course I used to say I loved her, but I always said that to all the girls I went out with. You have to say you love a girl because then they let you have sex..when you're a fifteen year old boy all you want is sex with as many girls as possible. You don't want sex because you love someone, you have sex because you want sex.

(Barrowclough 1999:2)

Barrowclough contrasts Steve's views with those of Tom, also aged 16 but attending private school:

Everyone only has sex with girls they're in a relationships with. No one I know has sex with girls just for the sake of it, everyone feels it's more important to be in a good relationship first.

(Barrowclough 1999:2)

Although Tom describes having a sexual relationship with his girlfriend, he emphasises the importance of the relationship, rather than the sexual content of the partnership.

Furthermore, and briefly in terms of risk and criminality, most deviant adolescent behaviour is associated with being male and working-class. Debates (and theoretical perspectives) surrounding this involvement are complex and cover a range of social, peer, cultural, gender and family factors (see Dennison and Coleman 2000 for a succinct appraisal of the debate). Dennison and Coleman comment:

High levels of male youth unemployment, caused by declines in old industries, linked with disenchantment with education contribute to marginalised sections of working-class young men. Crime provides not only status and confirmation of maleness, but also relief from boredom and, for property offences, brings financial gain.

(Dennison and Coleman 2000:145)

This point is reiterated by Stephen and Squires (2003) in relation to vehicle theft and 'joyriding'. In their study of 32 young men they emphasise links between stealing cars, being working-class, being unemployed, previous poor school attendance, the excitement gained from sharing a risky experience with friends and gaining status in their peer group and local community. They explain that, for the young men in their study, vehicle crime was often used to make sense of and structure their lives during the indeterminate state between unsatisfactory school experiences and 'the all important signifier of adult status for them: paid employment' (Stephen and Squires 2003:160). Dennison and Coleman (2000) highlight how crime can provide status and can confirm male identities, particularly in environments with few other existing outlets.

In relation to unemployment, Coleman and Hendry (2004) argue that poverty is critical in affecting the 'behaviour and experiences of young people' (2004:186), as is social exclusion. Thomson *et al* (2002) suggest that social and geographical location can help or hinder transitions for young people and this point is also made by Johnston *et al* (2000), who interviewed 98 young people from a white, working-class area of Teesside. Their research was described by the authors as containing elements of social exclusion, including high unemployment, few job prospects, increased crime and drug related offending. The researchers argued that those young people who became involved in 'criminal careers' and disengaged from school at an early age later progressed to more serious crime and drug use, particularly heroin, which was a serious local problem. However Johnston *et al* (2000) suggest that despite a pessimistic outlook, some positive factors, including education, key events and significant people, can have an impact on the individual trajectory of transition and alter the inevitability of unemployment and a career in drugs and crime. Thus, although the area in the study was considered to be socially excluded, the support networks within the area led the researchers to conclude that there were degrees of social inclusion. They comment that:

new opportunities to engage constructively with training, education and employment...and or the formation of new personal relationships – partnerships and parenthood – helped young people move away from crime and drug use.

(Johnston *et al* 2000:3)

They make the point that services like Connexions, an advice service for young people aged between 13 and 19 in the UK (Connexions 2005), can be instrumental in

breaking the cycle of under-achievement. In addition, they outline the positive role played by parenthood in moving some young people away from involvement in crime and drugs. This is an optimistic construction of the role of young parenthood and one increasingly associated within the desistance literature. For example MacDonald and Marsh in their study (2005) draw attention to Liam who was attempting to distance himself from crime after describing hearing his young children opening their presents on Christmas morning during a telephone call from prison. Similarly, Webster *et al* (2006:17) highlight the case of Danny (24) who attributed his desistance from offending as amongst other factors 'the birth of his daughter, childcare responsibilities and the discouragement of his partner.' Johnston *et al* (2000) also attached importance to key events, key people and networks of support as being influential in moving young people forward in a positive manner. These are significant concepts to take forward in this thesis and one of the key points of interest is to see how they 'storied' the transition to fatherhood and how parenthood, as in the research by Johnston *et al* (2000) and wider debates on desistance (Rutherford 1992), was largely constructed in a positive way.

1.1.6. 'Critical moments' in transition experiences

In the light of the above point it is useful to draw on the construction of transition suggested by Thomson *et al* (2002) who argue that it is possible look at transition by focussing on 'critical moments' or significant events in young people's lives. Using a biographical approach, they outline the way in which the young people in their study described negotiating transition, by looking at how a particular event such as leaving home or leaving education affected them. The research by Thomson *et al* (2002) has

been influential on the research described in this thesis in two ways. Firstly, drawing on the idea that a young man will be living with the consequences of a fateful or 'critical moment' with the birth of his child, there is a sense that this event may have been beyond his control. The power dynamics in the relationship with the mother would seem to be crucial in analysing the trajectory of his future path. A significant question to emerge during the course of the research described in this thesis was how the young men framed their sense of agency following the pregnancy and birth and whether they described adapting and interacting positively with the event. A second influential aspect of the research by Thomson *et al* is the use of a more 'storied' methodological approach with young people and this issue will be returned to for further analysis in Chapter 2.

1.1.7. Culture as a factor of transition

Coleman and Hendry (2004), reviewing evidence from a number of studies, suggest that family environment is crucially important in shaping cultural development. They remark:

The attitudes of parent to their own culture will have a profound impact on children and young people, and will inevitably affect the process of ethnic identity formation. (Coleman and Hendry 2004:68).

For example, with regard to African-American families, research by Thornton *et al* (1990) suggests that many parents socialise their children to be proud of their black identity. All of the young men referred to in the study for this thesis were white,

primarily due to the access and gatekeeping processes and the demography of the local area where the study was carried out, and these features are outlined in greater detail in Chapter 3. However, ethnicity is a feature of both the transition to adulthood and young fatherhood and white, working-class masculine experiences have shaped the direction of the research considered so far in this chapter.

In relation to the popular differentiations made between black and Asian young people in the UK, Pilkington (2003) argues that black Caribbean young people tend to be perceived as being 'rebellious' but portrayed as taking pride in their blackness, whilst Asian young people are often presented as caught between the tensions of two cultures. Returning to the point made earlier by Lloyd and Forrest (2001) in relation to the over-emphasis on single factors in some transition studies, it is important to acknowledge that differentiating between culture and other factors, for example gender or class, can be difficult. Ahmad (1996) maintains that it is too simplistic to emphasise culture as a factor which always over-rides others. Back (2004) argues against perceiving cultures as 'hermetically sealed absolute entities' (2004:28) and Frosh *et al* (2001) outline some of the complexities of evaluating culture:

Since cultural practices are racialised and gendered as well as classed, racialised masculinities are both culturally produced and productive of cultural practices.

(Frosh *et al* 2001:146)

All the 16 young men interviewed in this study were white, but as Frosh *et al* imply, their transition experiences have occurred in a multi-racial society. Back's (2004) work emphasises the interwoven nature of gender and ethnicity and the implications these combined factors can have both for black and white young men. He argues that

young black men may be admired in mainstream cultures for their perceived athleticism, but on the other hand they may be feared for their supposed violence and trouble-making. Back calls this the fear and desire dilemma (cited in Coleman and Hendry 2004:68). In addition, as the quotation from Frosh *et al* (2002) above suggests, the adoption of cultural forms is not simply a one-way process, with white always influencing black. Back (2004) suggests that there has been a recent 'taking on' of black cultural forms by white young men, including the influence of loose clothing and the adopting of 'bling', music and heavy gold jewellery. Ahmad (1996) argues strongly against seeing Asian, African Caribbean and white British cultures as entirely separate within the UK. He maintains that this stereotypical view assumes that white British people have a distinct culture which is in striking contrast to that of British African Caribbeans or British Asians, thus ignoring the diversity and integration which has occurred over two or three generations. Archer (2001) exemplifies this by showing how young British Muslim men's identity constructions are meshed with ethnic, gender, religious and cultural discourses. She argues that the young men in her study adopted, and drew on, a number of 'fluid shifting identities' (2001:98) and used them in different ways in their relationships with other people.

She states:

The young men in this study used black, Asian and Muslim masculine identities in quite different ways; as a shared site of solidarity against racism, as a resistance to whiteness, but also a means of drawing divisions between black groups and as an assertion of masculine power.

(Archer 2001:98)

Archer concludes that the young men in her study used their identity positions as an ongoing, reinventing process, thus challenging the idea of fixed racial groups or cultures.

Returning to the influence of family, Pilkington (2003) contends that African, Caribbean and Asian communities in the UK have, however, maintained a strong sense of ethnic identity and this often emerges as an issue, predominantly for young British Asians. He argues that 'inter-ethnic friendships are less common, mixed marriages are rarer and culturally distinctive practices are more prevalent'. Ghuman (1999) identifies that the root of these pressures is the conflict of values between home, family and wider society. Ghuman argues that for Asian families marriage is perceived as a union of two families, rather than being influenced by individualised westernised notions of romantic love. However, rather than viewing this issue of transition in stereotypical terms, Pilkington suggests that:

When it comes to the crunch, confrontations are avoided by parents modifying the traditional arranged marriage system to incorporate elements of consultation and negotiation, and by children accepting the authority of their parents.

(Pilkington 2003:207)

Although the transition experiences of British African Caribbean and British Asian young people are documented (Pilkington 2003; Alexander 2002), as well as wider debates on cultural difference and diversity (Brah 1992; Ahmad 1996) and teenage pregnancy issues in 'diverse communities' (DoH 2002), there are very few, if any,

studies of the experiences of young black and British Asian fathers in the UK and although this is beyond the remit of this research, this is a significant identified gap to which future research needs to contribute.

1.2. Transition and issues of support

The research of Gillies *et al* (2001) suggests that some young people make the transition to adulthood with few problems and with the love and support of their families. Their research indicated a positive connection between some parents and their teenage children 'emphasising the support and emotionally meaningful nature of their lives together' (Gillies *et al* 2001:1) and how important support is for young people during the transition years. Some of the elements of positive support outlined in their study include the importance of love, pride, understanding of independence, 'a strong sense of connection towards each other' (2001:1) and practical as well as emotional guidance.

Teenagers emphasised three facets of emotional support from parents: concerns and care, comfort and consolation, and 'being there'.

(Gillies *et al* 2001:4)

However, some young people who live with high levels of social exclusion or may be otherwise disadvantaged or marginalised, may have different experiences of support during transition, for example having experienced parental separation and divorce or abuse and neglect and the intervention of the statutory social services (Coleman and

Hendry 2004). As the Social Exclusion Unit Document *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs* points out:

Support, advice and guidance are vital to an effective transition. Most young people will receive this from parents and peers, but some – those most disadvantaged- will not be able to access such support.

(Social Exclusion Unit 2005)

This report highlights how young people often find it difficult to approach external services for them, either due to mistrust or because of previous bad experiences with adults.

Trying to identify the ingredients of support that young people need and respond well to is a complex process, as individuals and their families vary considerably. One factor identified from the research by Gillies *et al* (2001) is the way in which parents seem to subtly change their parenting approach as young people grow up, moving away from 'care and control' to 'guidance and advice' (2001:2). Connected to this, Dennison and Coleman (2000) suggest that young women and young men tend to communicate differently within families and this can have an impact on support:

On average, both young men and young women communicate with their mother on a more frequent basis than with their father. This difference is present across the adolescent period, irrespective of whether the young person lives in the family home[...] Communication with mothers covers a wider range of issues than with

fathers, where interactions are seen to focus on material and practical topics.

Mothers are usually closer confidants for young people of both sexes than are fathers.

(Dennison and Coleman 2000:89)

Frosh *et al* (2001) also emphasise the differing experiences of support described by boys. The authors suggest that the young men in their study identified their mothers as important agents of emotional support, reporting that their fathers were not 'emotionally or practically available to them' (2001:228).

One of the identified aims of this thesis is to explore the type and quality of the support and resources the young fathers describe having access to. There is a limited literature, for example, on how young men interact with their own mothers following the experience of becoming a father and the wider networks of support on which they draw. Chapter Six addresses how the young men in this study describe support from their mothers, fathers, partners and their partners' families and the professionals they describe being involved with.

Having highlighted support as being an important factor during transition, the next section of this chapter moves on to consider some specific examples of 'fast track' transitions and the types and quality of the support which these young people describe having access to. Jones (2003) suggests that young people who have to take on additional responsibilities are often fast track into adulthood. Examples of this include being a young carer, a young person leaving the care system or being a young parent. These are all situations which may well hinder young people from receiving support or engaging with transition in similar ways to their friends and peers.

1.2.1. Support and growing up fast 1: young people as carers

...you don't actually need..to know what Pythagorus' theory is....you need to know how to cook a dinner. (17 year old male; Barry 2001:2)

So far it has been suggested that transitions to adulthood do not occur at the same rate, with some young people dependent in certain ways but independent in others and their experiences of life may be broad or limited (Thomson *et al* 2002). For young people who are carers, leave the care system or become parents whilst in their teens, transitions to adulthood can become compressed (Biehal and Wade 1996). For young carers evidence suggests that very often a fast track transition happens within the young person's own home and may begin very early on in their lives (Cree 2003). Cree points out that the reasons for being a young carer and the range of tasks involved is vast (for example looking after parents and siblings with physical disabilities, mental health problems, alcohol abuse or learning disabilities) and the associated caring tasks have varying degrees of dependency and risk for the young person. Her research highlights the range of unmet 'worries' that young carers have, varying from their physical appearance to the health and behaviour of the person they were caring for and their own long term future (Gillies *et al* 2001; Cree 2003). Cree (2003) argues that whilst children and young people can often cope with individual problems or worries associated with caring, an increase in volume in these concerns can cause the young person serious difficulties:

The interconnectedness of problems and worries should be of great interest to those who are caring for, and working with, children and young people. It is known that where problems in adolescence occur at the same time, young people are more likely to get into significant difficulties. Young carers who experience a coming together of a number of worries and problems clearly have a high need for support in their lives. (Cree 2003:308)

One of the main concerns highlighted in the literature on becoming a young parent is their ability to cope with looking after a baby as well as themselves, financially, emotionally and practically (SEU 1999, 2004; Swann *et al* 2003). In contrast, the model of childhood presented when discussing young carers often focuses on their ability to deal with issues of their own adolescence and the often trying and difficult circumstances of caring for a parent or siblings. As Cree (2003) suggests, research with young carers looks at thresholds of coping for young people and suggests strategies of support. Research on young parents, however, tends to concentrate on the range of negative outcomes, in particular for the mother and child. This point has particular relevance for the present study. Representing young people as coping as a young carer is a very different approach to that of problematising being a young parent, even though both groups of young people may have similar problems and may need to use similar skills, for example looking after someone more vulnerable than themselves and dealing with a range of day-to-day practical and financial tasks. As Duncan points out:

As Phoenix concluded as long ago as 1991, teenage women who become mothers are not so much a unitary social problem, but more a heterogeneous category of mothers who have particular problems (and we can probably add in fathers here).

(Duncan 2005:7)

Research by Gillies *et al* (2000) also focused on the lives of young carers. The research found that being a young carer altered the young person's perspective on a range of issues but particularly in relation to education. Specifically, opportunities at school and in further education were not seen as priorities and were often missed, as they took the young person away from home where they were needed to care. The authors highlight that young carers seem to 'mature quickly and gain practical skills that aided independence' (2000:1). This point draws attention to young people's resilience and ability to adapt and cope. However, despite this positive feature the study found that inadequate social care services were provided to young people, and the support that was available was often not appropriate for the multiple tasks required.

Barry's research (2001), like that of Gillies *et al* (2000), found that young carers felt their needs were often denied or ignored by both their parents and professionals, especially when they were multi-tasking and multi-caring. Barry's study also included young men, although they were not represented equally in the study with young women, who are often not acknowledged as carers within families. This is an important point, as the caring role of young men remains a largely unexplored area in health and social care research, and is one which is returned to in Chapter Six.

1.2.2. Growing up fast 2: young people leaving care

A growing amount of research suggests that, like being a young carer, leaving the care system also exposes young people to fast track transitions, especially when compared to young people who grow up and leave the family home at their own pace (Biehal and Wade 1996; Allen 2003; Corlyon and McGuire 1997). Inman (2001) remarks that this accelerated move towards adulthood may be compounded by young people's experiences within the care system and, as a consequence, adds to their vulnerability when leaving:

Everyone knows that teenagers in care have pretty grim prospects compared to other groups of young people. Not only do they face difficulties with education and employment, but also research has shown that they are more vulnerable than their peers to sexually transmitted diseases and sexual exploitation. By age sixteen, one in four young women in care is pregnant.

(Inman 2001:1)

Allen (2003) takes up this point in her small-scale qualitative study of young people leaving the care system. She remarks that the reasons a young person enters the care system can often influence the quality of their post-16 transition experience. She states that for the young people in her study, 'Care history affected young people's ability to build and maintain significant relationships, their schooling, and their attitudes and self esteem.' (Allen 2003:viii).

Many of the young people in Allen's study left school and the care system with few qualifications and poor job prospects, which increased their exposure to financial problems and worries. Support was cited as a key ingredient of post-16 success, and those young people with family or long-term professional relationships formed whilst in care, were more likely to adapt and cope with the challenges of independence. Allen argues that transitoriness in relationships, employment and support increased the likelihood of the journey to adulthood breaking down. Similarly, Biehal and Wade (1996) conclude from their study that care leavers' experiences of the transition to adulthood are 'both accelerated and compressed' (1996:45). Their two-stage study included the views of both young women and young men, highlighted the vulnerability of care leavers, particularly to becoming parents and forming their own families. Very often it is highlighted that young people leaving care try to re-establish relationships with family members (Biehal and Wade 1996) and this can be fraught with difficulties, often similar to those that occurred when the young person came into care initially. These findings have been borne out by more recent studies (Corlyon and McGuire 1997; Allen 2003) which further emphasise the importance of support for young people leaving care, specifically support that is responsive, ongoing, flexible and 'tailored to their needs' (Allen 2003:ix). In addition, Allen suggests that professional support, when it is provided and accessed by young people, should endeavour to provide stability to the young people through continuity of key workers.

1.2.3. Growing up fast 3: becoming a young parent

It would be much easier if we lived at home and had a mummy to run to.

(Kerry, aged 16, in Reeves 2003: vi)

I think it's disgraceful – Girls go to school and aged 16 don't do no exams, think I'll open me legs, get a sprog and then I'm set for life.

(Stuart, aged 26, in MacDonald and Marsh 2005:128)

Becoming a parent whilst in the teenage years is also associated with a 'fast track' transition to adulthood and it is a 'fast track' transition which has had a great deal of attention in recent years (Swann *et al* 2003; SEU 1999; Allen and Dowling 1998; Tabberer *et al* 2000; Duncan 2005). Becoming a parent whilst young is often presented negatively in the literature, with pessimistic outlooks for both the mother and the child (Frost 2001; SEU 1999; Swann *et al* 2003), although Phoenix (1991) and Duncan (2005) offer more optimistic constructions. However, the outcomes for fathers are currently under-researched. A growing number of research studies indicate that teenage parents are more likely than their peers to live in poverty (Tabberer *et al* 2000) and deprivation (Botting *et al* 1998); have poor educational qualifications (Kiernan 1995; Wellings 2001); be reliant upon benefits (Allen and Dowling 1998; SEU 1999); generally have poor physical health (Irvine *et al* 1997; Tabberer *et al* 2000); have poor mental health, and receive poor ante-natal care (Simms and Smith 1984). Thus, as a feature of transition, becoming a young parent is associated with a number of negative characteristics.

Interest in young parenting has been seen as developing out of the concern in teenage mothers which emerged from the latter end of the 1980s and through the 1990s (Carabine 2001). One of the key debates within the literature on young parents

generally, and teenage mothers specifically, relates to the lens through which young mothers are viewed. For example, it is possible to identify two clear perspectives on teenage mothers. The first perspective is associated with the ascendancy of the 'problematization' and 'moral panic' discourses which came to the fore during the Thatcher years in relation to teenage mothers (Carabine 2001), including concepts from the 'underclass' theory (Murray 1989, 1994, 2001; Phillips 2001). Secondly, a more recent perspective derives from the New Labour government's work on social exclusion. (Social Exclusion Unit 2005). These perspectives are briefly considered below (MacDonald and Marsh 2005 also provide a detailed analysis of these perspectives and debates).

A number of conservative writers have suggested a link between a supposed decline in morality in contemporary society and an increase in criminal involvement, unemployment and births outside of marriage (Murray 1989, 2001; Phillips 2001). Specifically Murray claims the existence of a defined group, the underclass, who are described as not only poor but include, 'people at the margins of society, unsocialised and often violent' (2001:3). Central to this New Right view is Murray's belief that with the decline in the traditional two-parent, nuclear family, there has been an increase in crime and immorality due to the increase in lone motherhood. In particular, he argues that with the sympathetic stance of the welfare state in the UK, lone parenthood has become a rational choice for poor young women. This New Right perspective argues that individual morality is the result of a conscious choice in behaviour rather than of factors beyond individual control. Journalist Melanie Phillips (2001) argues, critiquing the social exclusion perspective of the New Labour

government, that 'poor' sexual morality from young people is the crux of the problem:

Despite the fact that it would never use the term (the underclass) the current government has accepted the idea; it just calls it social exclusion. The reason it's the same idea is that the government has understood that it is more than straight poverty. It's about behaviour that's created a lifestyle, which is permanently dislocated from the habits and way of life of the majority. And at its very heart is the disintegration of the family with high rates of lone parenthood and teenage pregnancy and whole communities where committed fathers are unknown.

(Phillips 2001:19)

Discussion of young people and young parents from this New Right perspective contributes to a negative discourse perpetuating the view that some groups, in particular the young and poor, are 'immoral'. A perspective of social exclusion, however, contrasts with this view, moving away from blame and looking instead at how certain groups of people are 'shut out' of society, largely due to factors beyond their control, rather than through choice (Walker and Walker 1997:8). The perspective of social exclusion sees problems such as unemployment, ill health, low income poor housing as being linked and moves beyond simply focusing on poverty. High rates of teenage pregnancy are seen as being particularly indicative of social exclusion.

Walker and Walker (1997) explain the difference between poverty and social exclusion:

Poverty is the lack of material resources, especially in income, necessary to participate in British society and social exclusion is a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which may determine the social integration of a person into society.

(Walker and Walker 1997:8)

This perspective implies lack of blame on the part of the individual and points to their marginalisation in society. Viewing young parents through this lens places the moral responsibility of solving these issues on to society as a whole. The UK Social Exclusion Unit report of 1999 into teenage pregnancy subsequently placed strategies, policies and solutions in place in an attempt to reduce teenage pregnancy rates dramatically for under 18s and under 16s by 2010 (SEU 1999).

Despite the increase of interest and volume of research on young people who 'fast track' into the responsibilities of parenting, negotiating a path through the findings and recommendations remains problematic (Swann *et al* 2003). It is generally agreed that particular groups of young women are vulnerable to becoming teenage mothers, for example girls from working-class backgrounds, care leavers, young women who are homeless, school excludees (SEU 1999; Swann *et al* 2003) and some ethnic minority groups (Berthoud 2001). The research is less clear about the role of fathers or about the most effective strategies for working with these young men. As Swann *et al* (2003) remark, becoming a parent whilst young is a result of a complex mix of motivations:

It is difficult to determine what works to prevent teenage pregnancy when some teenage pregnancies may be wanted and planned, others may be unplanned but wanted, and yet others may be unwanted and unplanned – there are many differing pathways to parenthood for young people and more research is needed to understand this better.

(Swann *et al* 2003:4)

Studies that have addressed the issue of becoming a parent whilst still a teenager, have tended to argue that it is a multifaceted issue with a mixture of ‘causes’ and ‘solutions’ (see Hudson and Ineichen 1991; SEU 1999, 2004; Swann *et al* 2003; Health Development Agency 2004; Duncan 2005 for a summary of these). Some of the issues within the wider debates within teenage pregnancy will now be briefly discussed.

Firstly, as Swann *et al* (2003) point out, there is a vast literature on teenage pregnancy which, while emphasising the importance of the subject, makes analysis and formulating conclusions difficult. Studies which address teenage pregnancy and parenthood often look at different aspects, focus on differing age groups and include a number of other variables which make direct comparison problematic. Secondly, in research terms the subject of teenage pregnancy is often attributed with different meanings. For example, a study of teenage pregnancy can simply include those which focus on young mothers, can relate to young parents generally, may sometimes include biological ‘fathers’ and their views, or may focus on the partner in the life of

the young mother who is not the biological father of her children; these fathers are referred to as 'social fathers' or 'father figures' by Featherstone (2001:179).

The confusion regarding the status of a father makes the assessment of outcomes problematic.

Thirdly, although there are significant studies relating to the 'causes' and 'solutions', or strategies for prevention of teenage pregnancy and young motherhood, how these actually apply to different groups of young mothers has still not been fully explored. For example studies by Hudson and Ineichen 1991; SEU 1999, 2004; Swann *et al* 2003; Health Development Agency 2004; Duncan 2005, all highlight some or all of the factors below as being significant indicators of teenage motherhood:

- Having early sexual intercourse
- Lack of contraceptive use
- Being a working-class young woman
- Poor educational achievement
- Living in social exclusion, deprivation and poverty, with joined up problems
- Being a care leaver
- Having a mother who was a teenage parent
- Being a young offender

In addition, strategies for prevention include:

- A unified approach throughout the country
- School-based contraceptive and sexual advice and provision

- Accessibility of advice in the wider community
- Involving young people who are already parents
- Abstinence education
- Multifaceted, flexible approach

The debate regarding the effectiveness of these approaches is not the focus here. The central issue is who is being targeted with a particular 'cause' or 'strategy' (all teenage mothers, very young women, care leavers, young men, both young men and women who are already parents) and what is the most effective strategy for individual groups. For example, in previous research I studied young women who became mothers whilst they were in, or on the fringes of the care system (Reeves 2003). The findings from this research indicated that most of the strategies outlined above would not be effective with this particular group of young mothers. I classified 'causes' or reasons for teenage pregnancy as being either situational or dispositional. Situational triggers are easier to address and more likely to be where a young woman has become pregnant due to lack of contraceptive use, contraceptive accident, or lack of knowledge, although as Duncan (2005) points out:

The evidence that there actually is a lack of knowledge, that increased knowledge reduces pregnancy and that low knowledge 'causes' teenage pregnancy is equivocal.
(Duncan 2005:2)

Most of these situational factors, however, can, arguably, be tackled by some of the strategies outlined above, for example by providing contraceptive education and provision in a suitable context. However, 'dispositional' factors refer to young

mothers who were more likely to be emotionally damaged, for example having been sexually abused, been in the care system or who had very low self-esteem. These young mothers required different, more complex solutions to preventing future pregnancies, for example perhaps individual counselling or therapy. Tackling a contraceptive error requires a very different strategy from working with a young woman or young man wanting someone to love. In addition, young mothers often go on to have more than one child (SEU 1999) and I would suggest that the cause of the pregnancy can change for each one. Consequently, when drawing conclusions on teenage motherhood and young parenthood, terminology, definitions and the meaning of the pregnancy and child for the parent needs to be fully explored before conclusions are drawn.

The research in this thesis aims to make a contribution to this wider debate on understanding young parenthood. Consequently the aims and target group of this study are specific, looking at a small group of young, disadvantaged fathers who are users of social services, and drawing implications for construction and working with them. The next section will specifically focus on studies which have explored the role of young fathers in parenthood.

1.3. Becoming a young father

With one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe, young fatherhood, as a site of economic and personal adversity, has become a focus of concern in Britain during the late 1990's. However, despite this policy interest there is surprisingly little British empirical evidence to review.

(O'Brien 2004:20)

That's it – bang bang – I'm gone.

(Stuart, 26, in MacDonald and Marsh 2005:138)

Contemporary research interest in young fathers seems to have grown from the literature on teenage mothers discussed above (SEU 1999, 2004; Swann *et al* 2003) and it can also be seen as being influenced by the changing way fatherhood is constructed, seen and talked about (Fathers Direct 2005). As Lambe (1997) contends fatherhood is viewed in a different way across time and between groups. Recently, as Tyrer *et al* (2005), argue there has been a growing emphasis on the discourse of 'new fatherhood' which emphasises the active participation of a father in the care of his child or children (Fathers Direct 2005). This positive discourse provides a stark contrast to negative stereotypes of young fathers, who are often perceived as feckless and distanced from the mother and child.

Like O'Brien (2004), the Social Exclusion Unit (1999) argues that fathers are still a largely unexplored part of the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy, although some research and literature in the UK has looked at the contribution and role of young fathers (Simms and Smith 1984; Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Speak *et al* 1997; Tyrer *et al* 2005). Statistics on young fathers in the UK, whilst providing some insight, do not reveal the full extent of young men who father a child, as the figures only include those who are named on the child's birth certificate. Figures indicate that 835 married men under the age of twenty became fathers in the UK in 2003. This figure rises to 11,197 young men in this age range who were not married. The figure for unmarried

fathers rises further to 45,000 if young men aged twenty to twenty four are included (ONS 2003). Statistically being a young father is more likely to be associated with relationships outside of marriage.

Within social work, analysis of young fathers' experiences is embryonic and can be linked to feminist perspectives on the position of men generally (Christie 2001) and fathers specifically (Daniel and Taylor 2001); both of these perspectives are discussed further in Chapter Two. Investigating *young* fathers can also be seen as part of the development of working with vulnerable young parents through agencies such as Sure Start and Sure Start Plus (Rosato *et al* 2004). As Strug and Wilmore-Schaffer (2003) remark, fatherhood generally is an issue which social work needs to address:

Fatherhood is a topic of national conversation that's receiving considerable media attention. The number of single and non-custodial fathers is on the rise and social workers will have increased contact with these men in the future. It is important for social work professionals to learn more about fatherhood, given the growing relevance of this topic.

(Strug and Wilmore-Schaffer 2003:503)

Moreover as Tyrer *et al* (2005) highlight there is a lack of evidence which specifically focuses on how the needs of young fathers, particularly those with a care background, 'might better be addressed through policy and practice' (Tyrer *et al* 2005:1107)

This section will outline common characteristics and features from the research data on young fathers and then examine the research findings in greater detail. Finally, the

chapter will draw out emerging themes and issues concerning young fathers in social work.

1.3.1. Features of research on young fathers

A review of literature on young fathers (just as in the transition research) reveals differences in the definition of 'young'. Sections of the literature reviewed in the following sections indicate an age span from 15 to 27 being used as definitions for 'young' fathers (Smith *et al* 2001; Quinton *et al* 2002; Chase *et al* 2004). This is a considerable span of ages. Rationales for age ranges used in research seem to cluster around studies which involve young men who are still legally children (for example in Gavin *et al* 2002) or even those young men under the age of sexual consent. Swann *et al* (2003) in a meta-analysis on teenage parenting suggest that only fathers under the age of 22 should be considered 'young' but they give no rationale for this. In the UK statistics indicate that the average age for first-time fathers, outside of marriage, is 27.8 (ONS 2003). Consequently, any age under this could legitimately be considered younger than average.

In relation to applying research with young fathers in social care contexts, this variety in age range can have implications. For example, evidence from the Sure Start Plus National Evaluation on Teenage Pregnancy (Rosato *et al* 2004) indicates that most of the advice given by this agency was to young people aged 16 and 17. Background data used to inform practice needs to be accurate and using data that includes experiences and concerns of older fathers may not be appropriate to the needs of 16 and 17 year olds. Recognition of this point, concerning age difference amongst

fathers, highlights variation and heterogeneity amongst young fathers. For example young fathers who come to the attention of the statutory services can be white, black, Asian, disabled, able-bodied, have learning disabilities or be offenders, or indeed a mixture of a number of these variables. Within the current limited literature on young fathers, age as well as social class and ethnicity are often buried and require teasing out of methodology sections.

Quinton *et al* (2002) set out their criterion for inclusion in their study:

We defined early fatherhood as expected parenthood between age 17 and 23. The influence of early risk factors is still present at 22 so 23 seemed an age at the margin of early parenting. Very young fathers (under age 17) were excluded on the grounds that this group is extremely atypical and therefore that involvement of parenting would be unlikely except under special circumstances.

(Quinton *et al* 2002:4)

As previously mentioned, statistics on fathering are not generally considered to be comprehensive (Swann *et al* 2003) therefore, an accurate picture of the demography of young fatherhood is not available. Thus, excluding a particular 'very young' group on the grounds expressed by Quinton *et al* (2002) seems a missed opportunity.

Methodologically there are also complexities regarding definitions in research on what constitutes a young father. For example Bunting and McAuley (2004) remark that one difficulty in analysing literature regarding young fathers is the use and definition of the terms 'father' and 'partner'. They both appear to be used

indiscriminately in research and are often used to describe current boyfriends as well as the biological father of a child. Not all research makes this clear and contributes to confusion when analysing the subject as a whole.

One of the first major research projects in the UK to consider young fathers was undertaken by Simms and Smith (1986) who interviewed 553 young, working-class women and 369 of their partners, who were also mostly working-class. This number of young men initially appears large, especially with the current lack of knowledge about young fathers (Swann *et al* 2003). However, Simms and Smith remark that by not talking to all the fathers their findings were slanted, as those they interviewed tended to be currently living with the mother of the child. Hudson and Ineichen (1991) pick up on this point and highlight how difficult research often is with young fathers:

..as the later stages of teenage pregnancies echo to the sound of slamming doors as fathers make their dash for anonymity and freedom.

(Hudson and Ineichen 1991:66)

Specific studies to date relating to young fathers have tended to cluster around three main types. Firstly, research whose primary focus has been with young mothers which, as a 'by product', has included their impressions of the father of their child (Corlyon and McGuire 1997, 1999; Reeves 2003,). The focus of this kind of research has been primarily on support networks for vulnerable young mothers (Bunting and McAuley 2004). Secondly, there has been research conducted with the specific aim of including the views of young fathers (Simms and Smith 1986) and thirdly (in terms of

social work research) a few recent studies (for example that of Chase *et al* 2004) which are specifically concerned with young fathers who are service users. Alongside these three areas is also research carried out in the UK looking at the involvement of fathers in family centres (Ghate *et al* 2000; Surestart 2003). However, this type of work has tended to focus on fathers generally, although 'young' fathers are mentioned as a part of a population of fathers who use services and need to be considered as part of future work. The next section will critically review the first three identified types of research set out above and evaluate the findings and conclusions.

1.3.2. Young fathers through the eyes of young mothers

One type of research which includes young fathers relates to studies where the primary aim was to investigate young mothers (SEU 1999; Tabberer *et al* 2000; Allen and Dowling 1998; Biehal and Wade 1996; Corlyon and McGuire 1997, 1999; Reeves 2003). Some of this research has been specifically concerned with young women who are service users or who are connected with the care system (Biehal and Wade 1996; Corlyon and McGuire 1997; 1999; Reeves 2003). In these types of studies the data on the young fathers was collected through the opinions, thoughts and feelings of the young women. Social work studies involving the young women's impressions of the fathers will be considered first.

One reason for the emergence of studies which have considered young mothers connected with the care system was the finding that young women leaving care were increasingly likely be mothers or become pregnant shortly following leaving care (Garnett 1992; Biehal 1992, 1995; SEU 1999, 2003).

Corlyon and McGuire's research (1997) involved interviewing 29 young mothers (7 under the age of 16) and one young father. One important methodological issue acknowledged by the authors was the unpredictability of these young women and the difficulty the researchers had in securing interviews with them:

Arranged meetings were frequently forgotten by young people, resulting at best, their surprise at receiving a visit or at worse, their absence from home. Visits were always successfully rearranged, though with considerable resource implications.

(Corlyon and McGuire 1997:13)

This serves as a useful reminder for researchers interviewing vulnerable young people that access, even though apparently arranged through gatekeepers, does not always secure an interview with the young person. Indeed, this perception was reinforced in my own previous research (Reeves 2003) where many interviews were cancelled due to the young mother not showing up. Factors influencing this appear to be events in their lives overtaking the young women, as well as practical issues with their children and perhaps deciding, at the last moment, not to participate. This issue will be explored further in Chapters 3 and 4.

The account of fathers in Corlyon and McGuire's research (1997) takes up themes and issues stated in previous research with fathers who are not specifically in care or using the statutory services (Simms and Smith 1986). Young fathers appear to be difficult to trace and interview and are consequently under-represented in research. Moreover, young men who participate are often those who are still with the mother and child

(Simms and Smith 1986). Non-resident and absent fathers tend not to be featured in research generally and social work research specifically. MacDonald and Marsh (2005) highlight, in their interviews with four 'absent' fathers, that absent fathers can be 'deeply troubled' by their lack of contact with their child/ren, thus leading to conjecture that they may not want to talk about their child due to the pain they may feel. Other explanations could also include the points made earlier, including fear, suspicion, and the transient nature of their lifestyle.

Corlyon and McGuire painted a negative picture of the situation for the young fathers portrayed in their research:

More fathers appear to be pushed out than drop out. Young mothers did not want them in their lives with their additional demands, smelly feet and useless offers of help. They had nothing to offer except an increased workload.

(Corlyon and McGuire 1997:85)

They found that rather than a young father absolving himself of his responsibilities towards the young woman and baby (signalled by the popular stereotype exemplified by MacDonald and Marsh 'bang, bang I'm gone' 2005:138) it was the young mother who often pushed him away. Obviously this description of events emerges from the partiality of the interviews with the young women; it is their side of a 'story'. It is also contrary to other images of young fathers (Hudson and Ineichen 1991), who are often portrayed in a stereotypical way, as being the ones to leave. My own previous work (Reeves 2003) suggests that the picture of the father's involvement is more complex, particularly when considering descriptions of support from the young

fathers. This study, of 24 young mothers in the care system, concluded that the older the father the less supportive and more exploitative he was likely to be, conforming to a negative stereotype of young fathers, for example openly living with another woman or in another relationship and providing little financial or emotional help. The younger fathers who were living with the young women were more likely to be described in positive terms as contributing to a greater degree financially and emotionally (Reeves 2003).

Bunting and McAuley (2004) also studied the role of fathers and the support they offered to teenage mothers. Analysing social work literature in both the UK and the US they emphasise the intricate and changing landscape of support relationships for young mothers and the specific role of young fathers, biological or cohabiting, in this. They argue that teenage mothers experience significant changes in their social support networks following the birth of a baby. Essentially, support from the young woman's mother decreases over time and it is the support from 'partners' which increases in importance. Bunting and McAuley (2004) frame this change in terms of the mother's 'romantic tie' rather than using the language of biological 'father' or 'partner'. They argue that the presence of a 'man' or 'partner' or 'romantic interest' becomes increasingly important as a mechanism of support; however, we are left unclear regarding the status of this man. Is he the child's biological father or a sexual partner? It would be useful to explore the feelings and emotions of the biological father in this scenario, especially in the light of the findings of Gee and Rhodes (1999) that only 17% of the young women in their study remained with the same 'romantic interest' over time. Serial partners may impact on the young mother's description of the

biological father and sexual partners in her life. Further exploration of this involvement from the biological partner's perspective would be useful.

1.3.3. Direct research with young fathers

Young men are often completely absent in the literature – there is an urgent need to find out more about the paths to early fatherhood, what works to prevent young fatherhood and how best to support young fathers.

(Swann *et al* 2003:12)

As the quotation above suggests, direct research with young fathers is an emerging research issue in the UK, whereas in the US research seems more advanced. As previously suggested, direct research with young fathers generally appears problematic. Firstly, as Allen and Dowling (1998) state in their research on young parents in the UK, the pregnancy and birth of a child profoundly affects the pattern of the relationship between partners, and this is exacerbated for young parents (Hudson and Ineichen 1991). Allen and Dowling (1998) found, at the time of their interviews, half of the co-habiting and two thirds of the 'steady' relationships had broken down (twelve months after the birth of the baby). This has implications for contacting the

young fathers and the ethics and viability of using the mother as a form of contact.

Secondly, the young mother herself may have moved on and be in another relationship (Corlyon and McGuire 1997; Reeves 2003) and the new partner rather than the biological father may be seen as the father-figure, potentially confusing and clouding the picture.

Findings from research which specifically focuses on the voices of young fathers can be grouped into three key areas. Firstly, factors which tend to be associated with the risk of becoming a young father; secondly, prohibitive and sustaining factors which appear to encourage young father's involvement in their children's lives; and thirdly, findings focussed upon young fathers who are service users or who have service needs. The first two will be briefly discussed below and the next section will focus on research with fathers directly involved with statutory agencies.

In their meta-analysis of teenage pregnancy in the UK Swann *et al* (2003) remark that a great deal of the data being used in the UK on young fathers comes from the US, and that the lack of information in the UK is 'striking'. From their review of research they conclude that, as with young mothers, there is a link between being a young father and being exposed to deprivation and exclusion. Young fathers are more likely to come from lower socio-economic groups (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Swann *et al* 2003) and families facing financial hardships (Kiernan 1995; Tyrer *et al* 2005). In addition these young men are likely to have left school at the minimum age.

Furthermore, as Tyrer *et al* (2005:1108) remark, 'Teenage fathers are more likely to have engaged in youth offending, with some estimates suggesting that more than a quarter of young men in young offenders institutions are already fathers or expectant

fathers.' However, it is also pointed out that 'data on young fathers is less easy to come by because it is not systematically collated' (Swann *et al* 2003:13).

Research on young fathers in the US also draws attention to the association between young fatherhood and risk factors such as low employment (Gavin *et al* 2002), poor educational achievement, engagement in criminal activities, multiple sexual partners and poor health information (Weinman *et al* 2002, Smith *et al* 2001).

Secondly, the involvement of young men in their children's lives also seems to be a complex issue, mainly influenced by the mother of the child and her parents (Rhein *et al* 1997). Evidence suggests that high levels of mother-father engagement centred on a loving, sexual relationship actively encourages the father to interact more positively with the child (Parke 1996; Lamb and Elster 1985; Lamb, 1987; Furstenberg 1995). Thus, fairly obviously, if the relationship remains strong between the father and the mother, he is more likely to be actively involved with his child. Conversely, if the relationship breaks down and the mother moves on to other relationships, the quality and degree of the father's involvement with the child is likely to decrease.

Also significant is the quality of the father's relationship with the baby's maternal grandmother. A study by Gavin *et al* (2002) ascertained that young fathers are more likely to be involved in households and families where the maternal grandmother had higher education levels and where the father had a positive relationship with her (Gavin *et al* 2002). They found that the maternal grandmother often acts as a gatekeeper towards the father, either encouraging him towards adopting a positive role or keeping him at arm's length depending upon circumstances.

This point is returned to and analysed in relation to the findings of the present study in Chapter Six, with a specific focus on the young man's descriptions of his family relationships and support networks, evaluating how he situates and negotiates these relationships. Connected to this point, it is argued by Smith *et al* (2001) that where the relationship with both the mother of his child and her mother has broken down, a young father needs help, not necessarily with looking after his child, but with communication and negotiation skills in the complex and sometimes hostile adult discussions regarding contact with the child (Smith *et al* 2001). This would seem an important point to highlight; some young men need encouragement to keep in contact with their child because of a lack of skills in negotiating with gatekeepers.

1.4. Social work research with young fathers

Research in the UK specifically on young fathers within social care or social work contexts, tends to be small-scale and based upon a few participants, although the project undertaken by the Trust for the Study of Adolescents which at the time of writing is currently being evaluated, involves working with 250 fathers under the age of 25.

The predominance of much small-scale research in social work, however, can be partly explained by reference to the practical, ethical and methodological difficulties of researching this group of vulnerable young people. As previously mentioned by Corlyon and McGuire (1997) and others, young people, particularly those in care, are difficult to 'tie down' to interview situations and their lifestyles can make them difficult to track (Allen 2003; Allen and Doherty 1996) and they can be guarded in

their responses. In addition, in order to access young people, social work researchers often have to rely upon the 'gatekeeping' of significant others, most often social workers and/or their managers (Corlyon and McGuire 1997; Reeves 2003). This situation can present its own challenges, where research may be given a low priority by busy social work professionals who may be difficult to contact and not fully conversant with the aims or scope of the research. These issues will be considered in relation to the present study in Chapters Three and Four.

Schwartz (1999) remarks that young men who have just become fathers, may be going through an emotional and confusing time, making them resistant to being interviewed:

Because teenage fathers almost never plan pregnancies, their initial reactions may be denial, fear, and a desire to escape. Young fathers frequently face family rejection, barriers to contact with child and mother, a lack of ways to contribute financially...they may also believe they are simply unwelcome and inadequate as parents. Their emotional state is further complicated by the need to reconcile the contradictory roles of adolescent and father.

(Schwartz 1999:1)

Young fathers may be suspicious of statutory services and anyone associated with them, fearful about talking to a third party as well as concerned with what may happen to the information they reveal (Schwartz 1999). These fears may constrain the number of participants in social work research. In addition, literacy difficulties may limit the method of research appropriate to use with this group as, in my own previous

study with young mothers in care (Reeves 2003) some participants' inability to read ruled out administering a questionnaire.

Turning to direct research with young fathers involved with statutory services, Bunting and McAuley (2004) point out that there is a more substantial body of research from the US than the UK. Obviously, studies conducted in the US have been carried out under a different welfare regime and it is difficult to synthesise their findings directly with research into young fathers as service users in the UK. For example, as Nesmith *et al* (1997) highlight many studies from the US are quantitative and many examine the correlations between young fatherhood and crime and deviancy, but also feature research looking directly at young fathers service needs (Curran 2003; Lane and Clay 2000; Weinman *et al* 2002).

However comparisons are possible, particularly in relation to the larger amount of research that has been carried out with young mothers; this is a theme of both UK and US research (Swann *et al* 2003; Booth and Booth, 2002; Jones, 2003). Bunting and McAuley (2004) remark:

While research into the role of family support and teenage motherhood is relatively common, investigation into the role of partner support is often conspicuous by its absence.

(Bunting and McAuley 2004:211)

The context of US research on young fathers as users of public services is more established, especially in the areas of offending and parenting (Schwartz 1999) and

with regard to the evaluation of young father programmes (Weinman *et al* 2002; Unruh *et al* 2003; Cochran 1997; Smith *et al* 2001). This provides a direct contrast to schemes working with young fathers in the UK, where projects are often small scale (Beebee 2000), reacting to local issues and limited in funding. The following section reviews the findings of some of this research and compares it with research from the UK on young fathers using the statutory services.

1.4.1. Young fathers as service users: issues of professional support

Findings in relation to young fathers who are receiving help from statutory agencies in the US and the UK tend to focus on the complexities surrounding identifying and meeting the needs of this hard-to-define group. In the UK, the study by Chase *et al* (2004) involved interviewing 40 'looked after' young mothers and 16 'looked after' young fathers with an age range of 15 to 23. In addition, 78 professionals were also interviewed. This approach, interviewing both young parents and involved professionals, initially appears encouraging and provides an effort to fill the gap regarding the over-reliance of information supplied by mothers in the UK. In the presentation of the findings, however, Chase *et al* emphasise the perspective of the mother, accepting her role as the main carer of the child and looking at her required support network, limiting discussion on the young father's perspective to one small paragraph:

Of the young men 56% were with the mother of at least one of their children. The rest had varying degrees of contact with their children by an ex-partner. Young fathers

described various economic, social and structural barriers to playing a part in their children's lives and said that their needs often went unacknowledged.

(Chase et al 2004:41)

Indeed, it is the detail of the 'various economic, social and structural barriers' to being a father cited by the authors which needs further examination and analysis, as well as discussion exploring the young men's direct views. Furthermore, the authors make a case for specialist practitioners to work with the young people, confidants who could 'ease the transition from care'. Whilst this is valuable, arguing for further resources to vulnerable adolescents leaving the care system, a more fundamental requirement would seem to be research into understanding the heterogeneity of these young people. Greater discussion into the factors which act as barriers and encouragement to the involvement of young fathers in the lives of their children would be valuable, as well as how practitioners can understand pressures on them so as to work more effectively with them. In a more recent analysis of this data, Tyrer *et al* (2005) focus more closely on the needs of the 16 young fathers. The authors make the point that 'identifying and accessing young fathers' especially with a care background proved 'complex and time consuming' (2005:1110). Indeed, they describe that sampling young fathers was a largely opportunistic experience, with researchers spending considerable time at social services provisions trying to identify young men who were fathers. Their findings set out the social exclusion and disadvantage that most of the young fathers described experiencing, especially describing having 'little financial security, low educational achievement and poor work prospects' (2005:1110). In addition, the young men emphasised their poor experiences of the care system and how their complex support needs were not addressed by staff, in an industry with a

particularly high staff turnover. Despite drawing attention to the positive emotions associated with becoming a young father, Tyrer *et al* conclude:

While experiences of social exclusion, bureaucracy and hassle and distant fathering may be common to young fathers from disadvantaged backgrounds, evidence from this study suggests that time spent in public care may compress these factors by making it hard for them to build trusting relationships important for successful fathering.

(Tyrer *et al* 2005:1119)

Chapters Five and Six address many of these issues through the data from the present study in this thesis.

Lane and Clay (2000) take up the point regarding professional involvement in their study with young fathers aged 14 to 19 in the US which focuses on the uptake of young fathering programmes. They maintain that 'adolescent fathers rarely turn to professionals for assistance' (2000:38) partly due to suspicion or fear (Sarri and Phillips 2004) but also due to some ethnic and cultural groups not defining young fatherhood as problematic or seeing it as disruptive to their lives. Lane and Clay (2000) argue that fatherhood is presented by the young men as often being less traumatic than some of the other events in the young men's past lives, for example, abuse or violence. Indeed, the birth of their baby often brings them attention and praise and they often do not see the need to attend fathering programmes which problematise the event. Lane and Clay (2000) further suggest that young fathers do

not form a self-identified, homogeneous group who actively seek services and offering services does not necessarily mean they will appeal to all, or be taken up.

To a large extent these findings concurs with the findings of Daniel and Taylor (2001) in the UK in relation to their work on fathers generally in social services. The authors claim that the needs of fathers vary, depending on individual circumstances and how they stand in relation to professional help. For example, if fathers are perceived by professionals (or indeed view themselves) as abusers or potential abusers, they may want to distance themselves from services offered, however well-intentioned. Conversely, some young men may feel that service providers set up barriers to including them, with a number of organisations having a negative view of them. A MORI poll conducted by Readers Digest (MORI 1999) emphasised some of these barriers. A survey of forty, 16 to 24 year old single, non-resident fathers in the UK, indicated that they wanted to keep contact with their child, despite not being in a relationship with the mother. They describe the main obstructions to this involvement as being, restrictions from the mother, 'lack of professional support from social workers, problems with housing and lack of knowledge about legal rights' (cited in Daniel and Taylor 1999:15).

Weinman *et al* (2002) in the US examined the views of a group of inner city 'young' fathers (the ages ranging from 15 to 31) primarily investigating their perceptions of their service needs. When asked to select their service needs nearly the entire sample cited employment (93%) education (77%), social services (64%) and preventative health care (59%). Recognition of the age range of the study seems important here and may have impacted upon the research findings, particularly in relation to

employment. The young fathers stated that achieving this goal (employment) would give them a defined role as a provider and status amongst their peers, and the authors pointed out that the young men appeared more enthusiastic regarding attending the programme when this was on the agenda. Appreciating the broad age range, recognition of this defined need for employment seems important as it can help focus the content of programmes designed for young fathers, with the inclusion perhaps of vocational training and interview skills (Weinman *et al* 2002). Encouraging employment is, however, a very different focus to providing young fathers with parenting classes or preventing abuse. Although the findings in the study by Weinman *et al* are significant what is missing is analysis based upon the age differential and ethnicity of the young fathers. It would be helpful to know if, for example, many of the younger fathers were asking for employment to be included or if it was across the age span.

Two further features of the research of Weinman *et al* (2002) are notable. Firstly, the large number of 'young' men who participated in the study (128) and secondly, the need for a more flexible approach from practitioners when dealing with this group. In particular, Weinman *et al* point out that practitioners should be more accepting of erratic attendance at group sessions and concentrate on working effectively with the young fathers who do turn up. Roll on – roll off programmes were cited as being a positive model for working with this group.

Strug and Wilmore Schaffer's (2003) review of fathers in US social work literature contributes further to this discussion. They reviewed 118 articles appearing in 26 major US social work journals between 1977 and 2000 and some of the articles were

concerned with non-custodial *adolescent* fathers. The authors found confirmation of the stereotypical image of non-custodial adolescent fathers have, as irresponsible and 'out of control'. This compares with comments from the UK (Hudson and Ineichen 1991) where young fathers are often presented negatively and given a bad name, despite sometimes being pushed out by the mother (Corlyon and McGuire 1997) rather than leaving of their own volition. Despite the prevalence of this stereotype many of the articles reviewed by Strug and Wilmore Schaffer pointed out how many young men 'cared deeply' about their children and 'value their parenting role, are actively involved in their children's care and provide emotional and financial support to their children' (2003:506). One of the themes to emerge from their analysis is the positive way many young fathers, those receiving services and those not, described feeling about their babies and children. Strug and Wilmore Schaffer highlight the factors which seem to affect a young father's continued involvement with his children over a span of years, including the degree of support available to him from family and peers, the attitude of the mother's parents, the extent of his own psychological fears about fatherhood, issues about masculinity and the degree of initial involvement in the birth process. The authors argue that adolescent fathers who are involved with statutory or external agencies 'have numerous support service needs, including education, emotional support, employment readiness and parent skills training' (2003:506). They remark that many of these needs are unmet due to the father being regarded as a member of the teenage mother's extended family and support network, rather than as a service user in his own right. This perception is often reinforced by the statutory agencies and their staff. These findings concur with some of the conclusions mentioned earlier and drawn from the limited work on fathers in general

in the UK (Daniel and Taylor 2001) and will also be an issue returned to in Chapter Six.

There is a dearth of research, particularly in the UK, relating to professional attitudes towards young fathers and the exploration of ways of engaging and working with them. The research evidence analysed in the present study for this thesis gathered impressions from young fathers on the subject of professional support and evaluated the methods they describe as finding constructive. These are set out in Chapter Six.

1.5. Transition experiences and young fatherhood: pulling the evidence together

The research studies reviewed in this chapter have focussed on different factors which influence transition to adulthood, including class, gender, culture disadvantage and social exclusion. The research has highlighted that some working-class, socially excluded young men have negative experiences during transition to adulthood which can be problematic for them, accelerate their transition and have poor long term outcomes. Young men who become fathers during the teenage years are more likely to have experienced a fast track transition, poor educational achievement, sexual risk-taking and social exclusion (SEU 1999). Some studies indicate that becoming a young parent can be positive for some young men, directing them away from crime and broadening their outlook. The vast majority of the research reviewed, however,

indicated that becoming a father in the teenage years is generally interpreted negatively and associated with future problems and negative consequences

In addition, support has emerged as a significant feature in the literature on young people. In the three groups considered in the chapter, young parents, young carers and care leavers, appropriate and consistent support was often lacking for those who were often struggling with problems, situations and worries beyond their capabilities. A difference in the way groups of young people are conceptualised was briefly drawn out of the literature. In particular the association was made that young carers are often seen as resilient and coping whilst young parents are often problematised.

When considering research with young people, the importance of analysing the definitions employed was highlighted. Specifically, definitions of 'young' appear fluid, both in research on young people generally and also young fathers, as does the analysis in terms of gender and ethnicity. Studies of young parents need careful analysis regarding which group is under consideration, as many are heavily biased towards the views of young mothers representing their perceptions of the situation. Furthermore, in research with young parents, defining who is being referred to as the father is often required, as a father can mean being the biological father of the child or a co-habiting partner.

One of the over-riding themes to emerge from the literature is the lack of research that specifically includes the voices of young fathers about their own biological children. In addition, young fathers are not a unified group, they are heterogeneous (as are young fathers who use social services) differing in terms of age, ethnicity, disability

and offender status. Of the studies which have considered young fathers in social work, evidence is limited in the UK. Research from the US, however, highlights that young fathers have definite service needs, but these may go unmet due to the over-emphasis on young mothers, but also due to their unwillingness to engage with statutory services. Young fathers with service needs are not a clearly defined group able or wanting to engage readily with services.

These findings form the background to the empirical research discussed in this thesis and will be taken forward and incorporated into the analysis and discussion in the theoretical, methodological and analytical chapters. The aims of the next chapter are to explore discourse as a framework for analysing the described experiences of the young fathers considered in this study, and to analyse the usefulness of narratives as a methodological tool.

CHAPTER TWO

CONNECTING PARADIGMS: THEORY AND METHOD

2.0. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter argued that, when exploring the transition experiences of working-class young men, certain key themes, issues and discourses can be identified.

The findings reviewed in the previous chapter indicated that these young men are more likely to be exposed to negative factors which will inevitably affect their transition experiences. Whilst acknowledging these findings, the position taken in this thesis is critical of approaches that locate individuals as passive recipients of their environments or birth. Rather, young men are interpreted in this study as active agents who make choices and interact with a range of socially available discourses and who take up positions within some of these discourses (Hall 2001; Edley and Wetherell 1997).

As much of the research in the previous chapter indicated, working-class young men may be limited in their choices by poverty and disadvantage in the options or discourses available to them. This is particularly the case in comparison to other groups of young people, for example, the middle-class young men attending independent schools in Barrowclough's research (1999) or some of the academic achievers in the study by Frosh *et al* (2002). However, this does not necessarily preclude young men from manoeuvring within and across discourses. As Leahy (1994) argues, 'Subjects construct gender as an ongoing process by taking up

positions from within a range of available and relevant discourses' (1994:70).

Furthermore, as Edley and Wetherell comment, 'people are simultaneously the products and the producers of discourse' (1997:206).

It is acknowledged by Parker (1990) and Potter *et al* (1990) that contemporary discursive theory is complex, diverse and contentious and has been used to inform a range of social research. It is not the aim of this chapter to comment on the development of discursive theory, or to contribute to the debate regarding the appropriateness of discursive terminology, as this has been done sufficiently elsewhere (Potter *et al* 1990; Parker 1990; Sarup 1993; Weedon 1987). This chapter will, however, argue that the use of a discursive theoretical approach offers an opportunity to explore how young fathers describe and locate themselves as both fathers and young men and to analyse their identity constructions.

Connected to this discursive theoretical stance, a later section of this chapter will argue that narrative methodological approaches are particularly useful, in exploring the ongoing construction of masculine identities. While acknowledging that there are a variety of narrative approaches, this chapter highlights the commonalities between narrative perspectives and evaluates the appropriateness of this methodology for research with vulnerable young people generally, and young fathers specifically.

Through the use of a discursive theoretical framework and a narrative methodological approach, a social constructionist perspective on self and identity is assumed in this thesis (Hall 2001; Gergen 1994; Wetherell and Edley 1997), whereby individual identities are perceived as fluid and ongoing, reconstructed within social interactions, social relationships and specific discursive contexts (Wetherell and Edley 1997).

The chapter has three main parts. The purpose of the first part of the chapter is to briefly set out the discursive background to the study and to analyse how positioning within and between discourses is a useful tool for the evaluation of identity construction. Discourses of adolescence, masculinity and social work, which may exert influence on the young fathers who are the focus of the study, are mapped and significant themes explored. The second part of the chapter will then describe the underpinning methodological framework of the study, the use of narratives in social research. It will then analyse how, by the use of this technique, social researchers can gain understanding of how individuals fashion represent and change their identities. Finally, the chapter will briefly set out how discursive theory and narrative methodology can work together in social work research with vulnerable young fathers.

2.1. The use of a discursive framework

Foucault's historical writings (1977, 1980) provide the theoretical background to this thesis. In his writings he describes discourses as systems of representation which regulate practices and represent meanings and knowledge about subjects, at different historical moments. Weedon (1987) argues that Foucault saw society as systems of meaning which are socially constructed and understood through language. Carabine (2001) comments that Foucault perceived these meanings, expressed through discourse, at a number of different levels. Specifically, Foucault argues that discourse is:

..sometimes the general domain of all statements, sometimes an individualised group of statements and sometimes as a regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements.

(Foucault 1972:8)

From the perspective of Foucault's post-structuralism then, discourse is perceived as networks of representation, constructed through language (Weedon 1987), interacting with power relationships (Moss *et al* 2000) and regulating societal practices. Leahy (1994) argues that there is no straightforward relationship between wider societal discourses and the social practices they inform; individuals do not passively act out ideas 'theoretically' contained within a system of discourses.

Foucault (1975) describes how discourses on madness were shaped and how, through language and social interaction, explanations were framed and consequently evolved (Parker 1990; Hall 2001). Furthermore, in *The Order of Things* (1970) Foucault points out how in medicine, within a comparatively short period of time, new and different ways of speaking and writing about the science evolved which previously had not occurred (Sarup 1993). Moreover, in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault calls into question the 'natural reality' of sexuality and maintains that sexuality is constructed by a system of discourses and social practices which are under constant surveillance (Sarup 1993). These examples illustrate the contextual and historical nature of discourses. In the contemporary arena of social work and discourses of childhood, Moss *et al* (2000) argue that some representations of childhood have been problematised, for example the assumptions surrounding 'children in need'. The authors argue that this constructed view of childhood has transformed how we think

about and respond to specific groups of children. They explain that 'constructions of children and childhood are constituted through power relations and dominant discursive regimes.' (Moss *et al* 2000:237). In a similar vein Edley and Wetherell (1997) argue that meanings associated with masculinity have changed over time.

They argue:

The analyses emerging in cultural studies and social history have emphasised the fiercely contested nature of masculinity over time, the multiple possibilities for masculine self-definition in different periods and the struggle which occurs to establish certain constructions as hegemonic and dominant.

(Edley and Wetherell 1997:204)

Similarly, in relation to the literature on working-class young men and young fathers, it has been argued that there are different systems of meaning which attempt to explain the actions and behaviour of young men. As the previous chapter highlighted, much of this writing is underpinned by the idea that masculinity generally is in crisis and that aspects of some young men's lives are problematic (Edley and Wetherell 1997; Gough and Edwards 1998), particularly their educational underachievement (Archer 2001; Reay, 2002), antisocial behaviour, criminality and sexuality (Mac An Ghail 1994). A discursive perspective argues that these negative representations serve to regulate how some young men are thought about and the central part that the state and expert systems of knowledge, such as social work, play in this. In addition, a negative portrayal of some young men, through these dominant regimes (Moss *et al* 2000: 237) (including in contemporary UK society the media, academic literature and debate) can act to normalise these negative expectations and in doing so further limit

the options available to some young men. However, although acknowledging this point, this negative portrayal does not indicate opportunities for individual agency or acknowledge the fluidity and changing nature of discourses. As Carabine (2001) explains:

Discourses are also fluid and often opportunistic, at one and the same time, drawing on existing discourses about an issue whilst utilizing, interacting with, and being mediated by, other dominant discourses (about for example, family, femininity, morality, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and class etc.) to produce potent and new ways of conceptualising the issue or topic.

(Carabine 2001:269)

Moreover, on an individual level some of the working-class, socially excluded young men in Johnston *et al*'s study (2000) (referred to in Chapter One) indicated that they expressed moving away from drugs and crime and took up new, more positive positions with the role of fatherhood. Other research described in the previous chapter (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; Social Exclusion Unit 1999; Swann *et al* 2003) highlighted that some discourses on young fathers are negative, portraying them as not involved or not present in their children's lives. It was argued, however, that this depiction is often simplified and related in part to the under-representation in research of the direct views of young fathers (Swann *et al* 2003). Talking directly with young fathers can create the opportunity for new and evolving representations of fatherhood to be produced

Moreover, in the context of social work, where the young fathers in the present study are located, Daniel and Taylor (1999) argue that men and fathers who are clients of social services are often presented negatively, associated with abuse and perceived as risks. Whilst this may be a correct representation for some men, portraying all men like this stereotypes them and, arguably, makes working with men generally difficult.

Foucault's analysis of madness and sexuality, mentioned briefly earlier, examined the construction of wider societal discourses and many informative contemporary studies have used this wider framework. Examples include Carabine's (2001) study on lone motherhood and the study by Rains *et al* (2004) on the contribution social services makes to the construction of discourses on teenage motherhood.

One of the purposes of the present study is to examine how a discursive perspective can provide an understanding of how young fathers who are also users of social services negotiate their positions and identities within available social, cultural and institutional discourses. As Leahy (1994) argues, in her study of the negotiation of adolescence and femininity, discourses offer the opportunity to perceive individuals as 'gendered subjects who make choices within a range of socially available discursive positions, moulding and creatively adapting discourses as they act' (Leahy 1994:48). However dominant discourses can also constrain individual agency. Consequently, the position taken by this thesis is to look at the agency of gendered subjects - the young fathers- and to analyse possible tensions and how they talk about, manoeuvre and contribute to new ways of constructing young fatherhood.

2.1.1. Negotiating discourses

The previously mentioned work of Carabine (2001) and Rains *et al* (2004), offers an illustration of the way wider discourses in society and the ways of talking about a particular issue shape the construction of a subject, such as lone motherhood. A discursive approach allows the opportunity to look at the relationship between 'language and practice' in a way other theories do not (Hall 2001:72).

As Hall comments, adopting a discursive perspective opens up the possibility of moving between what is said and what is done. He argues that on a micro level individuals exist within discourses and become 'the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourse produces' (Hall 2001:79). Discourses, he argues, produce opportunities for individuals to take up subject positions within them:

..we must locate ...ourselves in the position from which the discourse makes most sense, and thus become its subjects by 'subjecting ourselves to its meanings, power and regulation.

(Hall 2001:80)

Hollway (2001) remarks that taking up positions within discourses is complex. Specifically, she argues that discourses compete with each other, often producing 'incompatible' versions of reality and offering individuals potentially opposing available subject positions. This, she argues, can be confusing for individuals. For example, Edley and Wetherell (1997) in relation to masculinity draw on two representations of men found in popular culture, 'retributive' traditional man and

'new' softer man, which offer potentially contradictory images. They suggest that how individual men interpret and react to these two differing forms of masculinity is complex, with a great deal of variation in the ways men talk about their gender identities:

Although broad sweeping analysis of cultural types such as 'new man' and 'retributive man' are useful, what these analyses do not convey is the lived texture of the rhetoric and its instantiation in everyday discursive practices.

(Edley and Wetherell 1997:215)

Focussing on the detail of positioning within and between discourses, Hollway (2001) draws attention to the changing and evolving nature of discourses. Described as being one of the first to consider the relevance of discourse to psychology (Wetherell 2001), Hollway is interested in the 'micro' detail of discourse, looking at interactions between individuals, rather than how broader structures for example the media, culture and social policy, operate at societal levels. Through her research, identifying gendered discourses of sexuality, Hollway maintains that practices and meanings attributed by individuals allow them to *position* themselves in relation to others and within discourses. She argues:

Discourses make available positions for subjects to take up. These positions are in relation to other people...women and men are placed in relation to each other through the meanings which a particular discourse makes available.

(Hollway 2001:277).

Drawing on Foucault's sense of discursive meaning (Wetherell 2001), Hollway gives significance to individual agency and subjectivity, critiquing the 'all embracing' deterministic nature of discourses. She points to the multiplicity of discursive influences on individuals which, ultimately, increases the positions available to them:

By showing how subjects' investments, as well as the available positions offered by discourse, are socially constituted and constitutive of subjectivity, it is possible to avoid this deterministic analysis of action and change. (Hollway 2001:277)

Using Hollway's (2001) and Edley and Wetherell's (1997) ideas in the context of young fathers, it can be argued that there are a variety of discursive influences available to young men, for example, within relationships and being 'a couple' (the 'have and hold' discourse identified by Hollway) being a young man (including the male sex drive discourse also identified by Hollway), adolescence, youth culture, as well as those on fatherhood generally and young fatherhood specifically. Arguably, where and how young fathers position themselves, within or between these discourses, will be influenced by events in their lives, the fabric of their experiences, their social relationships, class, culture and gender positions. The next sub-sections briefly consider some contemporary discourses of adolescence and masculinity.

2.1.2. Positions within discourses of adolescence.

In relation to adolescence, Raby (2002) argues that it is possible to see the teenage years defined by five dominant (essentially western) discourses all of which, she argues, are presented as contemporary 'truth statements' on adolescence: the storm,

becoming, risk, social problem and pleasurable consumption. She suggests that, adolescence is 'marginalised and often laced with current popular concern about adolescents as dangerous, ungoverned and in need of control.' (Raby 2002:430). Relating to her work on young women she argues that these dominant discourses can trap teenagers creating 'a web' drawing them in, defining them and restricting positions for them to take up. Through her interviews with twelve teenage girls and eleven grandmothers (whom she interviewed to gain a multi-generational approach to her work) Raby (2002) focused on the minutiae of the lives of young women and how they negotiated their way around identified discourses. She found that adolescence 'intersected with' and was 'disrupted by' class, race, gender, and sexuality. In addition, she argues that the discourses she identified on adolescence are invested in by various external influences, for example, parents, government agencies and organisations. Raby argues that these external influences benefit from perpetuating images of young people as immature and untrustworthy. She suggests this process is a form of adult surveillance. Raby points out, however, that due to clashes and tensions between discourses, it is possible for young people to exploit gaps within and around discourses to 'carve out spaces for self assertion' (2002:430) and individual agency allowing for positioning and repositioning. In essence, the contradictions between and *within* identified discourses of adolescence can actually undermine them. Raby asserts that perceiving young people as being in the storm of adolescence, powerless in the advent of raging hormones and new feelings, is attractive to adults as they are then constructed as providing the rational, safe haven for the 'storm tossed young person' (2002:443). Similarly, in relation to risk, young people are presented as being vulnerable to dangers and outside influence and having little self control, emphasising the need for external surveillance and control by adults. Raby explains, 'Teenagers

are depicted as out of control, lacking in discipline wreaking havoc on the adult world.' (Raby 2002:444). She remarks, however, that many young people are not like this and are responsible, independent and self sufficient. An example of this would be some of the 'fast track' young people identified in Chapter One (young carers and some teenage parents) who carve out different positions and indicate how resilient and responsible they can be in the face of adversity.

Taking up Raby's (2002) ideas it can be argued that groups and organisations have interests in preserving certain discourses on adolescence (for example problematising young parents to discourage the irresponsibility and 'fecklessness' of young fathers) and these images serve to control them. Where young people do not correspond to those notions, it can be argued they are perpetuating their own agency, moving positions, creating different discourses, for example, discourses of responsible fatherhood or childhood, where they act in positions of trust and dependability. This is a theme which will be returned to later in Chapters 5 and 6 where the young men in this study largely present themselves as rejecting discourses of risk and irresponsibility and associating themselves with responsibility and a dependable image of young fatherhood.

2.1.3. Negotiating masculine discourses

In relation to gender, Weedon (1987) argues that not all discourses with which individuals interact are equal and consequently not all *positions* within discourse are equivalent:

Social relations, which are always relations of power and powerlessness between different subject positions, will determine the range of forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background.

(Weedon 1987:95).

Positioning within and between gender discourses is complex and Connell argues (1995, 2000) that masculinity is influenced by differing perspectives at different times, just as Foucault argued that definitions of 'madness' and 'sexuality' have differed historically. Connell (1995, 2000) and Cheng (1999) suggest that there are multiple versions of masculinities and femininities and that these are culturally and historically located (Connell 2000), influenced by power relations and also fluid, adaptive and interactive (Connell 1995). He points out:

Within the one school, or workplace, or ethnic group there will be different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of learning to be a man, different conceptions of the self and different ways of using a male body.

(Connell 2000:47)

However, he argues that differing forms of masculinity for example working-class, white and black, heterosexual and gay are relational to each other:

Different masculinities do not sit side by side like dishes on a smorgasbord. There are definite social relations between them. Especially there are relations of

hierarchy, for some, masculinities are dominant while others are subordinated or marginalised.

(Connell 2000:10)

Connell maintains that masculinities change and along with this change is a modification in dominant or hegemonic forms of masculinity. Consequently, as history and the context change so do definitions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995; Cheng 1999). Connell maintains that hegemonic masculinity is a 'culturally idealised form of masculine character' (Connell 1990:83) which many men subscribe to but few actually embody (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985; Cheng 1999). In their study of teenage boys in secondary schools Frosh *et al* (2002) argue that a contemporary hegemonic masculine ideal is influential in the 'fantasy lives' of many boys. They found:

...support for the existence of 'hegemonic' masculinity as a powerful idea that regulates boys' behaviour and for the notion that different masculinities are produced through performances that draw on the cultural resources available.

(Frosh *et al* 2002:76)

They argue, in line with Connell (2000), that boys are positioned and position themselves differently and as a consequence there are many 'different kinds of masculinities' (Frosh *et al* 2002:76) in schools, both dominant and subordinate. Mac An Ghail (1994) employs the idea of dominant and subordinated forms of masculinity in his study of the construction of gendered and sexual identities within a school. He argues that gender construction interacts with social and cultural forces:

..including increasing central and local state regulation, changing family networks, restructured labour markets, changing sexual patterns of consumption, peer and leisure group practices and media representations.

(Mac An Ghail 1994:13)

Mac An Ghail argues that 'learning to become a heterosexual man' (1994:13) in the context of a school environment is complex. He suggests that male heterosexual students in his study were involved in complicated relationships, 'trading' women and homosexuals in external social relationships. Although the young men in his study disassociated themselves from femininity, attaining forms of masculine identity was presented as a struggle. Mac An Ghail argues that much gender-making goes on within the informal negotiations of friendship groups where 'specific subject positions are inhabited' (1994:90), but a great deal of this negotiation also takes place within the context of the school and wider policies and procedures, for example the non-inclusion of homosexuality within the wider curriculum. Thus, the discourses to which young men are exposed and the relationships they form will influence the positions they take up. One part of Mac An Ghail's work analyses how young men in the school use sex talk to 'validate their masculinity to their friends' (1994:92). He argues that these sexual narratives, using the tools of boasting and exaggeration, results in 'collective peer identification' (1994:92). This process is described as bringing about the formation of 'ritualistic obsessive discourses' (1994:92) which the young men could continually revisit, thus emphasising and consolidating their form of masculinity. He maintains, 'In striving for masculinity they told and retold each others performance stories' (Mac An Ghail 1994:92).

The study of masculine gender identities in this thesis is not within the semi-closed confines of a school environment, nor is the aim of the research to undertake the study of peer and group interactions. However, drawing on Connell (1995, 2000), Edley and Wetherell (1997) Frosh *et al* (2002) and Mac An Ghaill's (1994) ideas, the intention is to look at how young fathers talk about, position and consolidate their masculine identities during their transition to fatherhood.

2.1.4. Positioning within discourses

The findings of this study, as set out in Chapters Four, Five and Six, suggest that renegotiating masculine identities following the birth of a child is difficult. For example one young man, Mark, whose experience is described in Chapter Six, maintained that negotiating a new identity as a father is part of his relationship with his partner, but is also conducted within the wider cultural context of his family.

Unfortunately for him, what is required of him by his partner is different from his own inclination and contrary to the expectations in his wider patriarchal family. Mark thus has to negotiate his own masculine position between these competing influences and his story describes how difficult this has been for him.

The work of Davis and Harre (1989) and Harre and Van Langenhove (1999) analyses how individuals, like Mark, position themselves within discourses. As Harre and Van Langenhove (1999:16) explain, 'Positionings can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts'.

They argue that individuals exert their *individual agency* within discourses to be positioned as powerful, powerless, dominant or submissive, free or constrained, and that they do this through the interactions in which they engage and through the stories they tell. Specifically, Harre and Van Langenhove argue that *stories* are the methods through which positioning, and ultimately identities, are navigated. This is a key concept in this thesis and links the theoretical framework with the methodological approach. Harre and Van Langenhove (1999) maintain that the locations taken up by individuals in conversations or stories are relational to the context and correspond to the co-constructed role adopted with the other or others in conversation. Discourses allow variations in positions to be taken up and these positions are influenced by a variety of features for example, the position and role of the other, how the person wishes to be defined, as well as the 'moral' and 'personal attitude' of the speaker. This is a point examined further in Chapters Four, Five and Six where the positions adopted by me and the young men in the interview situations are analysed in terms of this process.

Davies and Harre (1990) further argue that during interactions individuals engage in interactive and reflexive positioning, with the former relating to what one person says to position another, and the latter where an individual positions themselves. In relation to this 'reflexive' and deliberate self positioning, Harre and Van Langenhove (1999) suggest that individuals tend to lay claim to this by referring to the biographical events in their lives and drawing on their personal experiences and relationships. The authors argue there is often intention associated with this type of positioning: 'The stories people tell about themselves will differ according to how

they want to present themselves' (Harre and Van Langenhove 1999:25). They argue that others have a significant impact upon individual positioning. This is a theme returned to in the main data chapters. However, returning to a point made by Weedon (1987) mentioned earlier, people will have varying capacities to manoeuvre themselves or to attain some positions within discourses and this is often dependent upon wider issues related to class, race, gender or how wider discourses frames an issue.

2.1.5. Forced positions

Harre and Van Langenhove (1999) make the point that sometimes individuals are propelled or forced into positions with which they do not feel comfortable or over which they have little control. The authors argue that individuals can be pushed or manoeuvred by others into positions they would not usually take up, for example, by being placed by institutions, people representing these institutions, parents or even by partners into the role of being a young father. Harre and Van Lanenhove (1999) suggest that institutions often have the power to make 'moral judgements' about people and their behaviour and consequently individuals will very often have to respond to this external positioning by accounting for their behaviour. They explain this in relation to the legal context:

Offering an excuse by way of explanation is not just a way of resisting an accusation of guilt, but it is also an act of self positioning through which one adopts the position of one who is helpless and has the right to special treatment.

Harre and Van Langenhove (1999:26).

This point can relate to other organisational forms of positioning, for example, the positioning by social services of their clients. In social work contexts positioning can occur either in the presence or absence of individual service users, through the forces and powers of the statutory organisation and also by the law. For example, in case conferences professional participants position parents and children in different ways (Otway 1996) sometimes forcing parents to relinquish the care of their children. Occasionally, by participating in the case conference, parents or children may have the opportunity to stake their claim to a position contrary to that externally enforced. However, it is often ultimately the wider organisational positioning which will prevail, in the instance of case conferences, by deeming whether a parent is 'fit' or not to look after their child (Otway 1996).

On a smaller scale, through managing a case, a social worker will adopt a position in relation to a service user or family, which may be influenced by wider organisational discourses, or perhaps through individual perceptions gathered in the case work file. How the individual service user then locates or reacts to this external positioning may be dependent upon the interaction with the individual social worker and also from the wider agency.

2.2. Discourses affecting men as users of social services

Engaging with fathers has emerged onto the practice agenda in many child welfare agencies such as Sure Start. There also appears to be a strong emphasis pioneered by government upon involving fathers in the Children's Centres which are being

established. However developments are uneven with less evidence to suggest that services such as statutory social work are engaging with this agenda. (Featherstone, 2004:312)

As briefly mentioned in the section above, service users are affected by the influence of wider discourses from statutory social services. Relating to this study these discourses may impact on how a young male service user is perceived and positioned. This section, therefore, considers dominant discourses within contemporary social services and, as a consequence, explores some of the positions available for young fathers to take up and the potential for individual manoeuvrability within them.

Cavanagh and Cree (1996) argue that discourses within social welfare are not gender-neutral. They suggest that particular practices and responses are legitimised and normalised, often reinforcing traditionally perceived, stereotypical boundaries between men and women, with men seen as providers and women as carers. Bowl (2001) argues that central to the welfare framework in the UK is the Beveridge-derived discourse, in which men are seen as primarily the providers of material goods and not as the providers of care.

Cavanagh and Cree (1996), as feminist writers within social work, have drawn attention to the powerful patriarchal structures in society which 'oppresses women as service users and service deliverers' (1996:3). They remark that, 'Women are held to be responsible not only for their own lives, but also for those of their children, their partners and dependent parents' (1996:3). Ferguson and Rooney (1999) suggest that, despite changes or 'advances' in ideology and practice, for example the increase in

the number of women working, male unemployment, the introduction of male 'house husbands' as well as the increase in lone parent families, discourses of the father as a provider and the mother as a carer are still powerful. This point correlates with wider contemporary debates on masculinity and fatherhood (Lupton and Barclay 1997; Robb 2004). Featherstone (2004) draws attention to the need for a 'transformative' model for welfare which rejects the traditional breadwinner model for men and promotes a 'universal care giver model which 'aims to make men more like women in terms of doing primary care work' (2004:316).

From a feminist perspective Christie (2001) and Daniel and Taylor (2001) remark that patriarchal practices within contemporary welfare service provision are normalised by social work practice, even within anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive working practice, in relation to reinforcing boundaries between men and women. Men are often presented as having little involvement in the emotional life of the family. Feminist views on the position and role of men as service users in social work would argue that caring is still essentially feminised and this has implications for the way men interact with their families when they are receiving services, or when they need to ask for help, and how practitioners respond to and work with men (O'Brien 2004). Featherstone (2001) highlights in her discussion of the work of Ghate *et al* (2000) that a deep culture shift is required in providing and facilitating services for men, particularly in family centres. O'Brien (2004) and Daniel and Taylor (2001) argue that the majority of fathers tend to be absent from interactions between practitioners and families, as much 'social work' takes place during the day when men may be at work or absent from the family home. Featherstone (2001) points out a different reason, whereby the structure of families involved in the child protection process is

‘different from the overall socio-demographic picture in that fewer children live with both their own parents and more live with lone mothers or in reconstituted families’ (2001:180).

O’Brien (2004) suggests that father absence creates distance, often positioning men away from problems within the family and detracting from men’s participation in creating effective solutions. Moreover, he argues that dominant discourses of masculinity affect men’s identities and the way they behave. For example, contemporary constructions of masculinity suggest that men often repress feelings and emotions, weaknesses and symptoms (Connell 1995, 2000). In a study by Williams (1999), although men cited strong feelings of love towards their children, they explained they did not always find these feelings easy to express. O’Brien (2004) argues that this emotional reluctance can lead to men only becoming involved with social services when requested by their partner or when the issue is deemed very serious, for example, when care proceedings are going to be initiated.

Moreover, there is continuing research and debate surrounding the use of male workers in social work. The need for increased numbers of male workers has recently been highlighted particularly in family service settings working with fathers (Surestart 2003; Ghate *et al* 2000). However, Hainsworth (1996) makes the point that the idea of father or male ‘hunger’ requiring male workers to make up a perceived ‘deficit’ with men or to act as role models particularly with young offenders, de-skills women workers. She argues that the expertise of women practitioners is needed to help men and particularly young men ‘learn to value characteristics associated with femininity, co-operation and caring’ (1996:179). Bowl (2001) suggests that further research is

needed in order to unpick this complex web of gender issues in social work: 'We need to know more, for example, about whether men service users and carers find it easy to admit difficulties that they experience and whether they find it easier or not to share this with men workers' (Bowl 2001:125).

2.2.1. 'Men as risks'

The safest place for men is in the home. The home is, by contrast the least safe place for women

(Edwards 1989:214).

There are a number of dominant discourses relating to men as service users which may affect how social workers conceptualise and 'position' men, albeit unconsciously in their interactions with them (Daniel and Taylor 2001; Scourfield 2002; Featherstone 2003). Briefly, these dominant discourses can be summarised as 'men as risks', 'men as no use' and 'men as assets'

Daniel and Taylor (2001) argue that the threat and reality of domestic violence and child abuse is a powerful presence in social work practice, casting a 'monolithic' shadow over interactions between social workers and men, and often affecting how they are worked with. Research reviewed by Daniel and Taylor (2001) and Hester *et al* (2000) reinforces the idea that for children witnessing and enduring violence towards self, siblings or mother, is extremely negative and can influence future behaviour and self esteem. Violence and the threat of violence by men towards

women and children is a theme firmly embedded within social work and the legal system in the UK (Adams *et al* 1998).

Daniel and Taylor (2001) argue that the statutory social services still tend to look to the mother and her ability to protect her children in relation to child protection and intervention strategies. Featherstone highlights how violent men are seen 'as a threat to workers (2003:249) and Daniel and Taylor (2001) argue that the threat and practice of violence, as well as sexual abuse by men towards women and children, often leads to social workers not 'engaging directly with the fathers who are causing the problem in the first place' (Daniel and Taylor 2001:161). Moreover, Stanley (1997) argues that the consequence of this practice is that men become 'invisible,' with the result that they are not worked with and are not considered part of the equation. Coulshed and Orme (1998) further remark that with the majority of social workers on the ground being female, this consideration can influence practice.

Adams *et al* (1998) argue that risk is a real part of social work for all practitioners, but the perpetuation of the idea that all men are potential risks and the continuation of this as a dominant discourse in social work, may contribute to men not being assessed appropriately or at all (O'Hagan and Dillenberger 1995). Featherstone remarks that:

A significant number of men in families where there are child protection concerns have significant needs of their own.

Featherstone (2001:182)

Positioning men, albeit unconsciously, in a negative way or not considering them at all, allows men little room for manoeuvre or response. On the other hand encouraging involvement, by adopting a 'father sensitive evaluation' (O'Brien 2004) may introduce less negative discourses which may be of greater help in practice but, as previously mentioned, will require a deep cultural shift (Featherstone 2001).

2.2.2 'Men as no use'

Another dominant discourse within social work which potentially prohibits the positive involvement of many fathers is the idea of men as 'no use'. Daniel and Taylor (1999, 2001) argue that this discourse is perceived to have its roots in the maternal welfarist perspective cited previously, that women are 'naturally' carers and men providers and the influence of this discourse is further entrenched due to the continuing influence of attachment theory. As Daniel and Taylor suggest, the tendency for social work practice to concentrate on the primary significance of the mother is 'well rehearsed' and 'documented' elsewhere (see O'Hagan and Dillenberger 1995; Daniel and Taylor 1999). The main strands of this argument, however, include the continued tendency by practitioners to see the mother in the role of protector to her children and the main focus for intervention. In addition, the increasing fragmentation of families, with reconstituted partnerships and new relationships, can lead to confusion over status regarding biological and co-habiting fathers (O'Brien 2004) again reinforcing the central role of the mother in a changing landscape of relationships.

According to Daniel and Taylor (2001) the singularity of the mother in attachment theory (Rutter 1981) has been difficult to shift in practical terms and this has continued implications for men. Although fathers have the ongoing potential to involve themselves in their child's progress, the opportunity and ability to do this appears to be influenced by the father's proximity and relationship with the mother. This adult relationship, therefore, affects attachments and bonding between fathers and children. This is a particularly relevant point for young fathers, as evidence reviewed in Chapter One suggested that mothers and maternal grandmothers often act as gatekeepers towards a young man (Gavin *et al* 2002), allowing him access on the condition that he continues in a supportive relationship with the mother. Consequently, if a father is absent, at work, not the primary care-giver or not highly regarded by the mother or grandmother, then this can create distance in the relationship between the father and the child.

2.2.3. 'Men as assets' and the discourse of love

The Labour Government's Green Paper, *Supporting Families* (HMSO 1998) endorses fathers' responsibilities for child care as well as their more traditional 'bread winning' one (O'Brien 2004). As previously suggested, men have long been valued for their economic significance in families with their earnings within two parent families being positively associated with children's educational attainment and psychological well being (Marsiglio *et al* 2000; Burghes *et al* 1997). In addition, Flouri and Buchannan (2003) claim that a father's involvement in the family when the child is aged seven increases educational attainment, decreases the child's risk of involvement with the police, and furthers positive relationships in adolescence. Indeed, there is a raft of

research evidence which links fathers' involvement within their families' lives with a multitude of positive effects and serious implications if they are not (see O'Brien 2004 for a summary).

Despite this, men within are not often portrayed or situated positively within social work. The work of Booth and Booth (2002) looks at relationships between mothers and partners with learning disabilities. They confront the notion that partners with learning disabilities 'are either exploitative to the mother or bring trouble with them' (2002:187). They argue that the men in their study provided the mothers with three types of positive support: financial, human and social. This type of classification is useful, especially for the study of vulnerable parents who may be socially excluded and exposed to complex inter-connected problems. Although few of the men in Booth and Booth's study contributed financially (mainly due to their status of having learning disabilities and having few opportunities to engage in paid work) the authors point out that the men contributed strongly in terms of human and social capital. Human capital was associated with the skills, knowledge and personal attributes that the man brought with him to the family, while social capital related to the qualities he brought to the relationship with the mother, as well as their joint resilience as individuals:

For some of these women, their relationship with their partner gave them a valued role in their local community, access to a wider social network...but the main benefits for mothers of having a supportive partner came as increments to the families' human capital. Such partners brought with them a range of personal skills and accomplishments that added to the families' coping resources.

(Booth and Booth 2002:197)

This technique of breaking down the components of different types of support that fathers can offer, even in the most vulnerable families, has been a useful tool to take forward in analysing the part played by young fathers in the empirical research described in this thesis. It raises questions as to the ingredients that young fathers provide for their families and this will be further explored in Chapter Six.

Within the wider debate on the role of men and fathers within social work, love is often not mentioned. As research by Williams (1999) suggests, love is not an easy or tangible concept to express either within families or in research. This is a theme taken up by Fraser (2003) who argues in her work that 'social work has been reticent to directly engage in debates about love' (Fraser 2003:274). She argues that the problem-orientated nature of social work makes the study of love hard to 'accommodate'. Although she acknowledges that attachment theory recognises love, she argues that this theory focuses upon the primacy of the mother as well as the emphasis upon the nuclear family with its 'traditional sexual scripts' (Fraser 2003:275). This maternal focus does not often emphasise positive loving interactions between fathers and their children and she argues that movement outside of this portrayal is crucial to paving the way for broader discussion on men, love and nurture to be considered. Fraser critiques the lack of research in this area within social work, arguing that too often social work research is concerned with scientific rigour and 'professional status': 'Explorations of love that employ a narrative, conversational and democratized frame may appear too open ended, unscientific and even indulgent' (Fraser 2003:275). One of the reasons for adopting a narrative, 'storied' approach in

the thesis was to give the young men an opportunity to describe their intimate relationships and frame them in a way they felt comfortable with. The next section outlines how narrative methodologies can facilitate this approach.

2.3. Relating theory to method: narrative approaches to qualitative research

The aim of this section, therefore, is to briefly review narrative approaches used within social care research. The argument here is that the use of narrative approaches with young fathers in social work research offers the opportunity to study the ongoing construction of their identities, including how they position events and the dynamics of their intimate relationships. The first part of this section will briefly locate narrative methodologies in qualitative research, then move on to consider commonalities of narrative approaches, and finally analyse the use of narrative research in social work with young vulnerable people.

Qualitative research consists of different and often contradictory perspectives (Silverman 2000) and has differing underlying theoretical paradigms. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that the 'field of qualitative research is defined by a series of tensions, contradictions and hesitations' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:15). Research methodologies often reflect this and the approach taken is invariably influenced by the theoretical paradigm, as well as financial constraint, the interests and skills of the researcher, and practical issues.

Narrative research has evolved and become part of a repertoire of qualitative approaches including case studies, interviews, observations historical analysis, discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and participatory approaches (Denzin and 1998:3). Narrative research has grown out of the 'turn' to discursive research with its focus upon language and the social construction of identity (Harre 1979, 1983; Shotter 1975, 1984). D'Cruz and Jones (2004) argue that within both qualitative research and social work research there has been a move toward greater reflection on the part played by language, discourse and the construction of identity. These concerns have been termed the 'reflexive turn' within the social sciences (Denzin 1998). From a broader perspective this focus upon the importance of language and the reflexive turn is linked to post-structuralism in which discourse theory is situated. Parker (1990) cites the importance and influence of Foucault (1972), Derrida (1976) and Lyotard (1984) on this development. Issues of reflexivity and how the researcher interacts with research participants, have concerned sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists for more than twenty years (Denzin, 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The reflexive turn is associated with the move towards demystifying the construction of knowledge as well as highlighting the partiality and perspectivism of all knowledge. Researchers are encouraged to represent their part in the collection of the data, as well as their position in the analysis and distribution of it. Neutrality of status, which is assumed in much quantitative research, is brought into question. This focus on reflexivity and perspectivism is also reflected and debated within social work literature and research (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004; Reissman 1994; Fook 1996) and has emerged as a central theme in this study and will be returned to particularly in Chapter Four.

2.3.1. Commonalities of narrative research

There are a variety of different approaches to narrative research (Brockmeier and Harre 1997; Andrews *et al* 2000; Reissman 1993, 1994, 2001, 2003) evolving from the different disciplines it informs, for example sociology, psychology, anthropology, social history and oral history. Recently it has been suggested that the use of narrative approaches is increasing in health and social care (Gray *et al* 2002) and specifically social work (Reissman 1993, 1994, 2001, 2003; D'Cruz and Jones, 2004; Fook 1996).

Andrews *et al* (2000) argue that the term 'narrative' has emerged within social research to cover an eclectic range of approaches. These approaches have key commonalities or characteristics which are analysed below. I also evaluate how the approaches are appropriate within social care and social work research and how they 'fit' with research on young fathers.

Denzin (1989, 2000) states:

A story is an account involving the narration of a series of events in a plotted sequence which unfolds in time. A story and a narrative are nearly equivalent terms. A story has a beginning, middle and an ending. Stories have certain basic structural features including narrators, plots, settings, characters, crisis, resolutions.

(Denzin 2000:xi)

Bruner (1987) suggests that narratives are a unique series of events involving human beings as characters and actors and these characters are positioned as the story

unfolds. Positioning within stories is therefore a key feature of narratives. Positioning in a narrative interview is part of the unfolding story involving the situation of a person known to the teller, but not necessarily to the researcher. Harre and Van Langenhove (1999) suggest that in a 'well formed' narrative, characters, including the teller, are given a position. For example, the individual telling the story may attribute him or herself as being a 'hero' or 'heroine' or a 'villain' and can position other people in the story in this way. Gergen (1994) argues that once given a position a person will tend to remain placed in this characterisation throughout the story. Thus, a young father may position himself in the role of a 'good' father, being supportive to the mother, helpful and involved. If Gergen's theory (1994) is followed, the young father is unlikely to portray himself in this positive position in one part of his story and then negatively as a child-beating protagonist in another. Stories then, tend to reflect a consistency of position for self and others as characters, and although identity in this context is not seen as fixed beyond the boundary of that story, 'once defined by the story teller, the individual[...] will tend to retain an identity or function within the story' (Gergen 1994:193).

Gergen argues, however, that there are exceptions to this stability of characterisation. For example, there may be a positive variability factor, a change in the depiction of self or others, for example, where a frog becomes a prince, or evil becomes good. Gergen (1994) observes that a change in the portrayal of a person and their identity is more likely to come over time, be positive and come about as relationships alter in the larger narratives of a person's life.

Another common feature seems to be agreement on the use of obtaining stories or narratives through individual interview (Andrews *et al* 2000) where people retell stories of their lives. Approaches to the focus of narrative interviews differ, ranging from the highly structured Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) of Wengraf (2001) to Reissman's (2001) approach concentrating an interview on a 'personal crisis', Hollway and Jefferson (2000) use a biographical – interpretative method, part of narrative methodologies developed for life story work. This approach employs the technique of open, free association questions, encouraging people to talk about their lives, without the interpretation or judgement of the researcher, linked to the psychodynamic theory behind their approach.

Although techniques seem to vary, generally the unstructured or semi- structured interview is viewed as being the most common approach for narrative interviews. Mishler (1986) and Reissman (1993) both emphasise the importance of asking the 'right' kind of questions within a narrative interview in order to facilitate the telling of a story. Mishler (1986) argues that the unstructured approach is more likely to encourage stories as this design allows interviewees free responses. Reissman (1993), however, gives more specific guidance on the approach that should be taken, by suggesting that five to seven open questions should be used by the interviewer as an 'aide memoire' as well as using a 'tell me about it' approach with the participant.

Many narratologists (Leiblich 1998; Gray *et al* 2002) agree that the advantage of the narrative interview is based on the assumption that the ability to tell stories is a universal trait, 'People are story tellers by nature.' (Leiblich *et al* 1998;7). As Hardy (1968) says:

We dream in narrative, remember, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn hate and love by narrative.

(Hardy 1968:5)

Indeed one of the most positive aspects of narrative research is the view that it is a relatively problem-free technique, gaining insight into the complexity of people's lives through a relatively 'simple' approach of asking them to tell a story (Blumenreich 2004). Gergen (1994) argues that we are constantly influenced by and exposed to stories in all phases of our lives and through differing mediums, for example, in story books, magazines, novels, television, advertisements, the theatre and cinema. Indeed Gergen and Gergen (1983) and Blumenreich (2004) both highlight the positive advantages of using narrative methodologies with children, due to their familiarity with stories during infancy and early childhood within family, nursery and school environments. Within social work, stories are used as a technique for working therapeutically with children who have been sexually, physically and emotionally abused (Waldinger and Toth 2001; Page 2001). Moreover, the technique of storying experiences cuts across the life course and with differing groups of people, for example, in relation to research with people with learning disabilities (Walmsley and Johnson 2003) and oral history work with older people (Perks and Thomson 1998). Indeed, one of the themes which this thesis will attempt to draw out will be questioning the 'ease' of narrative storytelling..

2.3.2. Narratives: the validation 'of' and 'by' others

Following on from the brief review of commonalities of narrative approaches, encouraging a young man to tell a story of his transition to fatherhood may offer the opportunity to examine features which affect his self-characterisation and how he characterises others. Gergen (1994) and Harre and Van Langenhove (1999) argue that the stories individuals tell are, to a large extent, dependent upon the agreement and validation of others, with other people needed to endorse the narrative under consideration. Gergen (1994) contends that this is a complex process, not just relating to one-off individual micro narratives, or conversations. Rather, he argues, people tend to be embedded or 'knitted' into social relationships, maintaining the construction of others and selves. Again, to use an example relating to young fathers, it can be argued that in order to maintain a construction of himself as a helpful, supportive partner and father, an individual young man needs the corroboration of others that this is what he is. Indeed, to confirm this status as convincing in a story, he needs to draw in and position significant people, for example, his partner, his family and his partner's family, to bear this out. Individuals within social systems draw on others to play their supporting roles to maintain the complex 'network of reciprocating identities' (Gergen 1994:209). If a person reneges on this, they threaten the narrative or story and may need to be re-positioned by the teller. Thus, if a partner, relative or friend calls into question how supportive a young man is, then he or she runs the risk of being re-positioned and their motives and character questioned. For example, a young man could situate himself initially as an anti-hero, depicting himself in his story as being blamed for the pregnancy by a wider audience of parents and friends. However, as the story unfolds he may go on to present himself as evolving

and overcoming this negativity due to the love he has for his baby and the support he provides to his partner. On the other hand, a negative characterisation as a villain by others may stay with him. Many other positions and constructions are possible, but it is how and why young men may do this that is of interest here. By looking for 'stable', 'progressive', 'regressive' (Gergen 1994) or other narrative constructions it may be possible to understand further the wider discourses these young men draw on and in which they operate. As Gergen argues, it is important for social scientists to address and challenge 'the discourses of the lifespan' (1994:202).

A progressive story by a young man with events presented as improving in his life, gives a different picture to that of a young father who presents himself, others and situations negatively. Consequently, for social workers and social researchers, listening to how young fathers speak about themselves and how they position others is a useful tool for looking at the composition of support networks in families and relationships. Specifically, listening to how young men explain the challenges and highlights of becoming a father whilst dealing with social services, negotiating intimate relationships with their partner and family, can move forward understanding of masculine identity formation at this potentially vulnerable time.

2.3.3. Narratives and identities

Hall (2000) argues that narratives can be used as a resource to look at identity formation. He suggests that individual identity does not have a historically stable 'core', but evolves discursively, within language and relationships as a 'strategic and

positional one' (Hall 2000:17). Identity then does not remain a static part of the self, evolving without change. He suggests that a discursive perception of identity:

... accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiple and constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practice and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization and are constantly in the process of change and transformation.

(Hall 2000:17)

Hall suggests that identities are constructed *within* discourses, inside particular historical sites, formations and practices and within types of power relations, and evolve and respond to altering circumstances and relationships. Mishler (1995) claims personal narratives are a crucial resource for understanding identity construction. There is an increasing body of narrative research which examines the ongoing negotiation of social identities within different social contexts (Reissman 1993). Indeed, Cressy *et al* (2002) argue that identities created in this way are 'constructed in and by the context of cultural master narratives' (2002:229) whilst Flaskas adds that identity is negotiated by the individual through 'conversational becoming' (Flaskas 1999:22).

From a discursive, social constructionist perspective, identity construction is not a static, once and for all condition, but is a process, that is ongoing, and never completed. We are continually 'reconstructed' and construct ourselves within discursive and social contexts (Harre 1993; Henriques *et al.* 1984; Potter and

Wetherell 1987; Shotter and Gergen 1989) and are open to processes of re-negotiating our identities through the stories we tell (Edley and Wetherell 1997). Flaskas (1999) maintains:

The self becomes a storyteller and self-identity is created in a continuing process of narrative which creates and changes to experience of self.

(Flaskas 1999:22)

Significantly Flaskas (1999), like Gergen (1994), points to social and cultural factors which impact upon the self and the formation of identity. These factors include 'intimate' family relationships, gender, sexuality, culture and class, as well as broader systematic and institutional influences. Flaskas argues that these influences are not limitless and people exist in particular 'landscapes' of events and significant others. As previously explained the experiences of young fathers who are users of social services are likely to be within milieu which include being socially excluded, living in poverty, having had a 'fast track' transition period (Jones 2003) a fragmented family and poor social resources to draw on. Consequently their experiences may have been restricted and their significant relationships may not be stable. These factors may influence how they tell their stories, the wider discourses they draw on and how they situate and characterise themselves and others (Gergen 1994).

Many narrative theorists have argued that narratives can give insight into historical and cultural processes (Gergen (1994) and Reissman (1993, 1994, 2001, 2003; Denzin 1989:73). Andrews *et al* (2000) argue that narratives, conducted within wider cultural contexts, reproduce and contribute to cultural storylines. In the present study this

approach offers opportunities to reflect on different cultural stories of being a young father within the wider meta-narratives of contemporary Britain. Mishler (1995) argues that stories evolve from cultures and provide a frame for interpreting collective experiences (Cressy *et al* 2002:226). Brockmeier and Harre (1997) concur with this and maintain that narrative forms are 'interwoven' with broader cultural 'discursive orders' which essentially determine the stories we tell. Reismann (1994) emphasises that 'culture speaks itself' (1994:69) through an individual's story, offering the opportunity to examine gender inequalities, oppression and power relationships.

2.3.4. Problems with narrative approaches

Narrative approaches are generally presented as a positive and essentially 'problem free' methodological framework with many shared commonalities. In essence, they present a researcher as enabling a respondent to tell stories and talk (Blumenreich 2004). However, the approach is not without problems. Reissman (1994) highlights the apparent ease of narrative approaches, but cautions that by encouraging individuals to 'tell their stories' researchers run the risk of listening to a vast array of potentially worthless information:

Moreover, some people or groups who are the subject of narrative research methodologies may be less at ease or receptive to the approach than others. The narrative method seems particularly appropriate with individuals who are used to communicating well and at length, rather than those who are not used to or find it difficult in talking freely, which could include some young people. Adolescence is described as a time of changing relationships, feelings and emotions (Dennison and Coleman 2000) and young people may not feel at ease talking with a stranger.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) point out that eliciting stories from people is not always easy, and people's story-telling abilities vary enormously. Moreover Gergen (1994) argues that 'the more capable we are in constructing and reconstructing our self-narrative the more broadly capable we are in effective relationships' (1994:256). This research raises the question that perhaps the reverse of Gergen's argument also applies; the less capable individuals are at effective relationships, the less able they will be at telling their stories. Social work research reviewed earlier pointed out that men are often reluctant to engage with or 'communicate' with statutory agencies (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001; O'Brien 2004). As previously mentioned in Chapter One, young men may not always be forthcoming conversationally, especially if they are suspicious or worried about the motivation for the questioning. Frosh *et al* (2002) summarise these concerns:

On the whole, boys in the teenage years do not have the reputation of being good and compliant talkers...the popular view is that boys (and men) are 'emotionally inarticulate' lacking the capacity to name and therefore even to experience feelings and emotions, and in particular to engage in sustained and reflective conversation about their feelings for and relationships with others.

(Frosh *et al* 2002:22)

Frosh *et al* (2002) point out that the participants in their study were given the opportunity to choose between individual and group interviews. They remark that some boys chose individual interviews as it offered them the opportunity to talk at greater length. They found the stereotype of the uncommunicative teenage boy unsubstantiated in their study. They explain:

..what was striking about almost all of the interviews was the engagement and fluency of the boys..As it will be evidenced throughout...while they did not necessarily find it easy to express their emotions clearly, they nevertheless mostly gave it a good try, became very involved in the interviews and produced accounts of themselves and their experiences which were expressive, convincing and richly nuanced.

(Frosh *et al* 2002:23)

The boys in their study were drawn from a mixture of independent and state schools and the interviews were mainly conducted within the school settings. Boys who are actually within a school setting and used to participating in the daily life of a school may present as very different subjects from young men for whom school is not a daily occurrence and who may have had less than positive experiences. Some socially excluded young fathers may not have been exposed to situations where they are encouraged to talk, let alone *positively* construct and reconstruct their identities. Indeed, they may be more used to prison contexts and being dealt with a degree of suspicion by the police and statutory agencies. Appreciation of these essentially negative factors could provide a convincing argument for not conducting narrative interviews with young fathers. However, drawing on the evidence presented in the next section, as well as confronting the possible stereotypes of young 'uncommunicative' men, the position taken in this study was to offer young, socially excluded fathers the opportunity to 'story' their experiences and to use this as a vehicle to generate data for social work research.

2.4 Social work and narrative approaches: access to marginalised voices?

One of the most important advocates of narrative approaches within social work is Reissman (1993,1994, 2001, 2003). Her work argues that narrative research within social work offers the opportunity for investigating significant and traumatic events in people's lives. In her work (1994) she draws together the work of several social work researchers to illustrate how narrative approaches are being used to study physical and sexual trauma. She highlights how narration, the telling of stories about particular traumatic events, accords with therapeutic approaches to working with clients and how this can help individuals 'move on' (White and Epston 1990). Reissman (1994) argues that this 'moving on' process is helped by a narrative approach as narratives are never concluded and can continually be pondered and changed. As Hyden (1994) remarks, narratives are always subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation by the individual and this is an important theme in much social case work.

Reissman (1994) suggests that social work research needs to focus more on personal narratives as they offer an intimate method to access 'meaning making structures' in individuals' lives and this process is important for professionals working with them. She draws attention to research investigations which have used narrative approaches, in her terms 'successfully'; one dealing with the life stories of thirty delinquent girls (Robinson 1994), another looking at violence in marriage (Hyden 1994), and her own work on physical abuse in marriage (Reissman 1990). She claims that these studies illustrate how by 'unpacking' (1994:70) the text, looking at language use and the representation of experience, the researcher can gather 'knowledge' in a distinct way.

Robinson's work (1994) describes how delinquent girls are proactive in the ways they used drugs and alcohol as a form of self-anaesthesia to cope with abusive and threatening situations. Through the use of open-ended interview techniques, including a 'tell me about it' interview approach, the young girls were prompted into a range of responses, with many discrete 'stories' intermingled with biographical details of school, friends and sexual activity. Robinson underlines how the narrative technique she adopted 'allowed each interview to flow as a conversation' (1994:82) using various language probes. She also cites how she 'prepared' for these interviews by:

...reading related studies, read works of fiction and drama that have similar subjects as themes...I wanted to ensure that I would be well prepared for the interviews, that neither shock, dismay, nor judgement would censor the girls stories.

(Robinson 1994:82)

Robinson's study is valuable for the present study with young father in two main ways. Firstly, she offers advice on preparing for narrative interviews with young vulnerable people, in particular by adopting a conversational approach with them. Secondly, although her research emphasises the links between young women, delinquency, drug and alcohol use, by adopting a narrative technique the young women were able to frame how and why they used them as a resource. By giving a voice to these young women, Robinson opened up the debate regarding the belief that all young delinquent girls need to be 'reformed'.

An understanding of the meanings the girls give for their behaviour may serve to enlighten policy makers and practitioners who work in the agencies that serve girls like these. (Robinson 1994:92 – emphasis added)

Similarly, by giving young fathers the opportunity to express their own meanings may help to broaden understanding of working with this group.

As well as drawing on Robinson, Reissman draws attention to the work of Hyden (1994) and her research on marital violence. Hyden's research offers practical considerations for conducting narrative research with vulnerable people. In her study, interviewing couples on their recent experiences of marital violence, she aimed to talk to both husband and wives. However, locating and inviting the husband into the study proved to be problematic, again emphasising the point mentioned previously regarding the difficulty of engaging some men with the research process. Hyden speculated that the men in her study often hesitated due to not wanting to be formally associated with violence. She describes explicitly how threatened she felt on one occasion when invited by a frightened wife to explain to her husband what she, the researcher, was doing at his house:

I felt very small and no research method assisted me at that moment. The only guidelines for how to react I had learned from my parents, so I held out my hand, said 'good day'. The man took my hand; when I felt how sweaty his hand was I understood how afraid he was. I suddenly felt calm.

(Hyden 1994:98)

Hyden's research serves as a reminder that when conducting research with vulnerable people, regardless of the methodological technique used, the researcher needs to be continually aware of the concerns of the respondent, as well as their own personal safety. As Hyden argues, participating in a research project on any social problem is a 'demanding task' (1994:109) and can require courage in dealing with a range of circumstances and events.

Also, in relation to the data obtained, Hyden (1994) argues that male and female informants formed their narratives differently. The women tended to focus on the middle part of a 'story', the actual violence itself and the consequences of the violence, whilst the men looked at what provoked the violence. She remarks that had the men not been encouraged to fill in the details of the violent incident during the interview, they would have left it out. Moreover, in terms of telling the story of the violent incident, the men were more likely to frame it in terms of a 'fight' with their partner, with the implications of dual moral responsibility, rather than the 'blame' of an assault. Thus the language and emphasis that respondents use in a narrative interview would appear significant and again having the opportunity to look for the emphasis young fathers place in their stories offers a unique opportunity.

2.4.1. Social work research with vulnerable people

As Hyden's research exemplifies, social work research often involves working with vulnerable people and can expose researchers and participants to risks (Bell and Nutt 2002). Bell and Nutt highlight some of these risks for practitioners, as well as the possible conflicts of interests that can arise from being a practitioner researcher. They

argue that individual practitioner researchers need to 'self-regulate' in relation to choosing how far they emphasise the practitioner/social work side of their role and how they behave and react in the field. They remark that this process 'involves making professional as well as research judgements within specific settings' and that 'potential conflict or tensions between these roles need to be acknowledged' (Bell and Nutt 2002:71).

Nutt (2002) draws attention to the tensions she found between being a social researcher and a social worker. She came to the conclusion that there were many 'crossover' points between these roles and acknowledged that she needed to accept being the same person with two different 'hats'. This determined how she conceptualised her research. For example, sometimes she was already known to her interviewees as a social worker and was asked for advice during the course of the interviews. As a response to this she describes her technique of turning off the tape and switching into social worker mode in order to answer the question, and then resuming her researcher role once the answer was complete. However, she notes that there were unforeseen tensions which had to be dealt with in the context of each situation. She describes a situation where, on leaving a research interview, she noticed a sexually explicit picture on the wall of a foster carer's home. In her capacity as a practitioner, she explains feeling that this picture was not an appropriate image in a home offering refuge to potentially sexually abused children. In her role as a researcher, however, she felt it was not really her concern. Ultimately, she describes how her role as a social worker overcame that of a researcher and she reported her concerns to the local authority. This is a clear example of making 'judgement in context' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). This approach acknowledges that the

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conducted with children and young people, especially in relation to social work research. Like Powell (2002) they argue that despite the move in social work towards including the views of service users, 'hard to reach' children, who are frequently in greatest need of good services, have tended to be marginalised in enquiries about those services (Curtis *et al* 2004:168). Their point emphasises that particular groups of children and young people are often excluded from research, often those for whom 'the discursive nature of conventional interview research is less accessible' (2004:168) and they argue that social research tends to focus on and include those who 'communicate well'. Specifically, they point out that groups of children and young people who may be excluded from social research include those who may be perceived to be uncomfortable with one-to one discussion, for example young people with poor attachments, offending histories, long care histories, or those who are socially excluded. One of the arguments in this thesis is that socially excluded young fathers who are clients of social services are a group of young people whose voices are not traditionally heard.

It has been argued that there are inherent tensions and complexities highlighted by researchers conducting research within social work and with young people.

Awareness of these debates influenced how the research for this thesis was thought about, set up and conducted. As D'Cruz and Jones summarise:

The researcher's awareness of the actual research process would include the recognition that, unlike its representation in textbooks, actual research is not neat and orderly and problem free. Furthermore, the researcher's awareness of what is going on in her or his research would enhance the opportunities for flexibility in addressing

problems that may emerge that are specific to the context. These problems may include the appropriateness of the design and strategies for gaining access to people, places and data.

(D'Cruz and Jones 2004:33)

2.5. Theory and method: taking the paradigms forward

In this chapter I have set out the theoretical background to this thesis and have argued that the use of a discursive framework is fitting when looking at the transition to young fatherhood of a particular working-class and socially-excluded group of service users. Young fatherhood and young masculinity are viewed in this thesis as being socially constructed through language and influenced by a range of interacting factors, including contemporary discourses of masculinity and adolescence as well as factors of class and age. These factors affect the ongoing identity construction of these young men. Identity construction is interpreted in this thesis as fluid, being constantly reconstructed (Hall 2001) and negotiated within social interactions, social relationships and discourses. Drawing on Foucault's historical writings and other theorists (Weedon, 1987; Edley and Wetherell 1997; Hollway, 1984, 2001; Leahy 1994; Harre and Van Langenhove 1999), it has been argued that young men are active gendered subjects, being positioned as well as positioning themselves and others within discourses.

As users of social services the young fathers in this study are a heterogeneous group, affected not only by the factors discussed above, but also wider discourses from social services. The research evidence reviewed suggests that the role of men as service

users in social services is still dominated by maternal discourses and men are often perceived negatively as being absent, not involved, risks or 'no use' (O'Brien 2004, Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001). Whilst it is acknowledged that some men are abusers, absent, 'no use' and not involved, this negative portrayal leaves little room for manoeuvre for those men who are not. Positive constructions, associating men with love for their children for example, are difficult to reconstruct (Fraser 2003), even though research evidence suggests that some young fathers actively want to be involved with their children and that involved fathers have a positive influence on them (O'Brien 2004). It has been argued in this chapter that by giving voice to a group of disadvantaged young fathers not usually considered in social research, their meaning-making structures can begin to be unpicked, thus increasing the knowledge base and opening up the debate about this group.

In the second part of the chapter it has been argued that narrative approaches are a positive methodological framework to use with this group of young fathers, despite the mentioned stereotypical images of uncommunicative young men. Based on the use of language and the individual 'storying' of experiences, narratives offer the potential to capture the active and ongoing construction of these young fathers' identities and the social processes and relationships they interact with. Drawing on the work of Gergen (1994) and Reissman (1993, 1994, 2001, 2003) it has been argued that a narrative approach offers the opportunity to view how a young man frames his life following the significant event of becoming a father.

The focus of the next chapter is to take these methodological and theoretical issues forward and to outline how they shaped the empirical phase of the study.

CHAPTER THREE.

HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

3.0. INTRODUCTION

As set out in the Introduction to the thesis the focus of the research was on how the young men described negotiating their identities and relationships upon becoming a father, as well as the strategies and resources they used to do this. In addition, I wanted to incorporate a reflexive approach into the research by analysing the construction of the interviews, and to look at wider implications of adopting a narrative methodology with young fathers. Moreover, as the previous chapter has indicated, the methodological approach for conducting the research in this study was through narrative interviews

This chapter details the process of the study and describes all aspects of the research, including how the participants were chosen, how access was negotiated and the role of gatekeepers, negotiating informed consent, confidentiality, how the interviews were conducted and how the data was analysed. The first section details the framework and process of the study.

3.1. Overview of the research process

3.1.1. Factors of influence on the study

In line with the stated aims of the study I wanted to include stories from young biological fathers, and those about to become fathers, in contact with social services. Early on in the research design my focus of interest was on primarily biological fathers who were under 21 because, as Chapter One highlighted, there is lack of previous data in this area (Quinton *et al* 2002). However, as the literature and research reviewed in Chapter One also indicated, the definition of 'young' varies considerably in social research. Consequently, as my involvement with social work teams increased and the difficulties of gaining access to young fathers became apparent, this initial age benchmark of 21 and under altered as I became concerned about turning away 'young' fathers who were above the arguably arbitrary age and about losing potentially valuable data.

I also wanted to concentrate on fathers and their biological child or children rather than men who were present in a family primarily due to having a relationship with the mother. The main reason for this was that I wanted to capture the young men's stories about the transition to biological fatherhood, rather than their transition to being a step- or cohabiting father, though I can see that there may be a case for future research with these groups.

It became increasingly apparent, as the period of research extended, that 'young' fathers who are users of social services are a heterogeneous group, difficult to track

and gain access to, and I am aware these factors ultimately affected the selection of the group of young fathers that I interviewed and the direction of the study. In particular I had not anticipated that all the young men participating in the study would be white (perhaps reflecting the demographic make up of the area of the study, or the difficulties generally of gaining access to black young fathers) and this factor invariably shaped the findings of the study.

Having conducted previous research with vulnerable young people (Reeves 2003) I was aware that access issues may be complicated, take considerable time and require extensive consultation. Hence the field work enquiries were started very early on, towards the middle of the first year of study. The geographical location of the study was along an area often referred to as the 'Thames Corridor' in the south east of England. This area was chosen as it was one I was familiar with and where I had previously collected data. Pockets of this area have been recently regenerated, with new houses and the largest shopping complex in the UK. However, there are also areas of social exclusion and housing estates which are generally regarded to have poor local amenities and are associated with high levels of social work intervention.

The collection of the data was divided into two main periods: the first was from March to November 2003 and the second from February – May 2004 and, as the section below details, identifying, gaining access to and interviewing young fathers who were service users was an extremely difficult process and ultimately justified this early start.

3.1.2. Gaining access to young fathers

It is generally agreed in the literature that identifying and gaining access to vulnerable families, some of whom are legally children, requires extensive negotiation (Alderson 2004, France 2004). As Masson (2004) states:

Researchers cannot simply focus on researching children and young people who can be readily contacted and are articulate.

(Masson 2004:45).

I was not a practising social worker at the time of the study and therefore did not have an existing route to gain access to young fathers through a position of employment, although I am aware that this situation would have raised its own practical and ethical issues. However, I had conducted previous research and had also been acting as a social work tutor for the Open University which brought me into contact with relevant social work teams, some of which I spent time with prior to starting the study.

The initial phase of the research involved written contact with senior managers in two Local Authority social services departments in the south east of England. In the letter I explained the aims of the research and asked for the opportunity to talk with them in greater detail about its purpose and extent. This initial written contact was followed up with a telephone call, during which further details of the research were explained. Appointments for face-to-face meetings were then made with six senior managers who expressed an interest, during which issues regarding the research were explored. In the course of these meetings, verbal permission was given to me by all of the

managers for the research to be carried out and for the results to be disseminated.

None of the managers required me to go through an ethics committee within social services or to provide any additional written or verbal information to them, or to report my findings to them. On reflection, although this gave me a free hand to conduct the research as I saw fit, this freedom also encouraged me to ensure transparency throughout the research process.

Also of relevance to the study was that during the 'life' of the research, the regulations informing social research were in the process of changing significantly, both within the Open University (2003) and, on a wider level, within the Social Research Association. The research for this thesis was not directly required to comply with these new guidelines, as they were in the process of development during the first period of active research. However, as this and the following chapter sets out, the ethical issues surrounding the conduct of the research were addressed carefully and although I was not required by the Open University to apply their guidance retrospectively, my position was largely commensurate with the internal and external guidance mentioned above.

In particular, the lack of external regulation on the research influenced my approach as a researcher, encouraging me to self-regulate and to record this process as an integral part of the thesis. Chapter Four is a record of part of this process.

Having given verbal permission for the research study, the senior managers agreed to speak with the appropriate team managers. I then made telephone contact with these managers during which I explained further details of the project. Specifically, eight teams were involved in recruiting young fathers to this study: one leaving-care team,

one 16+ team, two young offenders teams, one children and families team, one disability team and two family centres. In addition, many of the young men who participated in the study (and their families) were users of local Sure Start Projects. Following conversations with the team managers I went to talk with team members and, where possible, young fathers were identified.

3.1.3. Identifying participants for the research: the role of gatekeepers

From the stage of agreement with the team managers considerable time was spent with team members, identifying appropriate and 'willing' young men. During this phase I was influenced by two sets of statistics. Firstly, that the average age for a first time father in the UK is twenty seven (ONS 2003) and secondly, that the majority of young men who become fathers outside of marriage in the UK do so between the ages of twenty and twenty four (ONS 2003). As previously stated I was interested in 'young' fathers, so in the light of the above statistics any father under the age of twenty seven could reasonably be considered 'young'. In addition, I speculated that many of the young fathers I interviewed would not be married and would therefore be under the age of twenty four. I felt that these statistics enabled me to relax my initial age boundary of twenty one and under. I learned as time went on that a flexible approach was necessary, particularly when trying to gain access to a group who were not readily identifiable and with whom making contact was often a slow, problematic process.

Gaining access to research participants is described by Millar and Bell (2002) as usually being 'relatively unproblematic' in mainstream social research. In social

work research, although it is remarked that children and young people often like being interviewed (Munro *et al* 2005), practical difficulties, for example incorrect addresses, can lead to delays in tracing often transitory young people. I found the process in this research with young people complex and multi-layered. As Walmsley (1998) points out in relation to research with people with learning disabilities, access can be a complex process:

Working through intermediaries extended the chain of communication about the research. In one instance the project had to be explained to five people before I got to speak to Eileen, the interviewee.

(Walmsley 1998:129)

As Alderson (2004) remarks this is often also the situation with research with children:

Access is one of the hardest stages of research with children. Their many gatekeepers...can both protect children but also silence and exclude them.

(Alderson 2004:105)

It is argued by Edwards and Ribbens (1998), Mauthner (2002) and Milnar and Bell (2002), in relation to social work research that there is a need for reflection on the ways in which 'judgements are made about who might be suitable interviewees' (Milnar and Bell 2002:56). In the context of this study, as in many others, identifying suitable participants meant working co-operatively with social work gatekeepers, and decisions needed to be made about *how* to select young fathers from the vast array of

young families with whom social services work. Unfortunately, the social work agencies with which I worked did not have a database listing all young fathers who were service users. Indeed, the ethics of keeping names and addresses of vulnerable children and young people on a database is problematic (Alderson 2004).

It quickly became apparent that the social workers I approached initially had to 'dig deep' to recall whether a father was present within a family, or indeed if the father-figure they were considering was the *biological* father of the children, a cohabiting partner or a step-parent by marriage. I am aware that the way in which the biological fathers were selected for the study was variable, altering with each social service team and with each team member. I was aware of my position of disadvantage in this process, due to not having access to the social workers' wider knowledge of their case-load or the case files. From my previous research, I was also aware of the complexities regarding the dynamics between the researcher, the gatekeeper(s) and the service user. In particular I was concerned that a service user may agree to an interview to 'please' their social worker rather than out of an interest in the study. Consequently, I ensured that the young man had the opportunity to 'opt in' through his contact with me later on in the process, rather than just through the negotiation with the social worker. The potential interplay of power between all parties in social research is multi-faceted and some of these complexities are summarised by the Social Research Association below:

On occasions a 'gatekeeper' blocks access to subjects so that the researchers cannot approach them directly without the gatekeeper's permission. In these cases social researchers should not devolve their responsibilities to protect the subjects' interests

onto the gatekeeper. They should also be wary of inadvertently disturbing the relationship between the subject and the gatekeeper whilst respecting the gatekeeper's legitimate interests. They should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the subjects once they have gained access to them.

(The Social Research Association 2003)

I was not a current practitioner and therefore dependent upon the assistance and good will of the gatekeepers, usually team managers and practitioners, and on my continued enthusiasm in order to successfully complete the project. Munro *et al* (2005) highlight how complex negotiation and communication can be with the various individuals involved. As previously stated, however, I did not want the young men to feel coerced into the study, and there were several points where the young men could withdraw from the process, even following their initial agreement to participate. I have represented this gate keeping process in Figure 1 below:

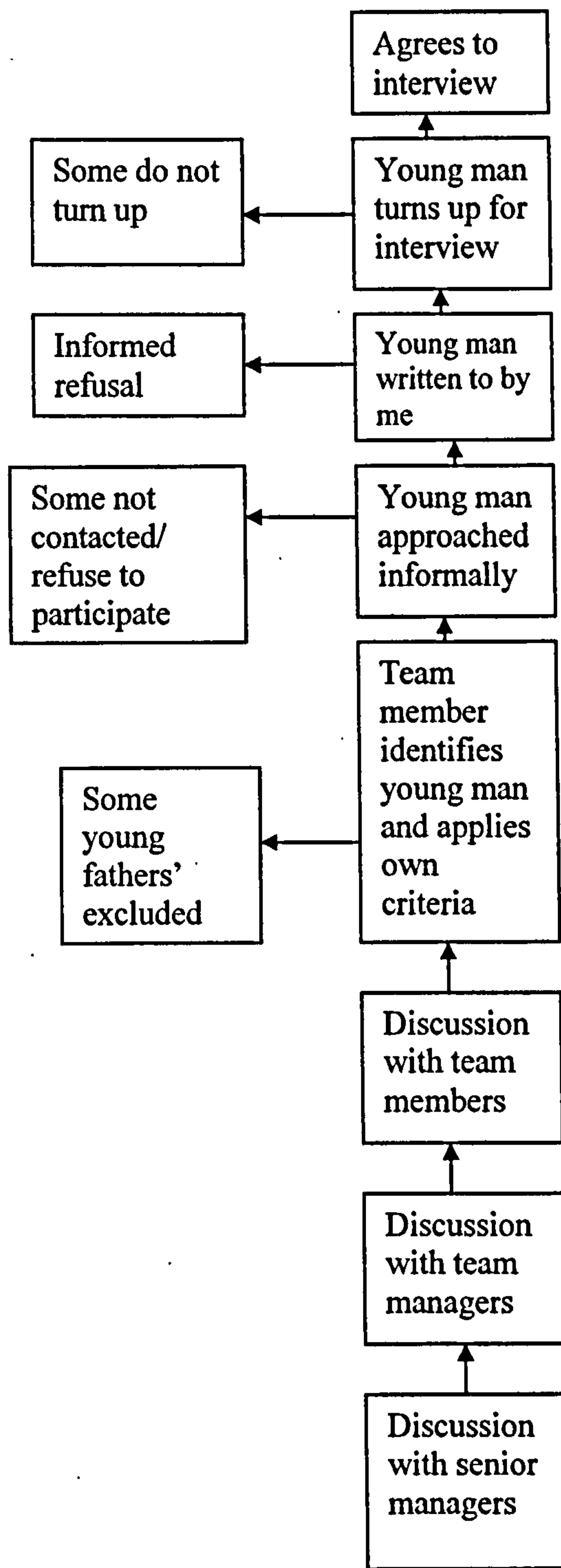


Figure 1. The gate keeping process in this study

Once a young man was suggested, the social worker would not always have exact details of his age or necessarily his relationship to all the children in the family. In addition, the social worker may have already gone through an essentially 'hidden' (from me) and subjective process regarding the young man's suitability for the research. While I was not made aware of the criteria for this pre-selection process by the social worker, it is possible to speculate that the reasons for deeming some young men 'unsuitable' to interview could include his previous behaviour, his level of perceived risk or the delicacy of the case. This process encouraged me to reflect that there may be a further group of young fathers who are hidden in research processes and may be useful to target for future research.

Once a young father had been identified and his details made known to me, my approach to him was influenced by some of the findings in Chapters One and Two regarding the 'positioning' of men within social work, specifically the maternal focus of a great deal of social work (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001) with the use of mothers as gatekeepers to fathers. I therefore asked the social workers that the fathers should be approached directly and not through their partners, as I wanted the young men to make their own decisions regarding whether or not to participate in the research (Alderson 2004). However, one of the limitations of using gatekeepers was my uncertainty regarding the extent to which this was carried out. On occasions this process added to the delays in the research as some social workers reported that fathers were not as accessible to approach as mothers.

Once the practitioners identified potentially 'suitable' young fathers, who were involved with their biological children and were under the age of 27, the social worker

approached them informally and asked if they were interested in participating in the study. This can be seen as the start of the process of informed consent.

I gave each social worker a brief statement of the aims and scope of the research, and also a list of the areas I would be interested in exploring, so they could accurately represent the research to the participants (Appendix B). If the young man indicated to his social worker that he was interested in participating I then wrote to him, briefly explaining the research again, with a tear-off strip and self-addressed envelope for him to return his contact details and indicating a suitable time to meet with him (Appendix C). This was another clear step in the process of him giving informed consent to participate in the research.

Walmsley (1998) comments on the process of relying on gatekeepers:

Actually finding people to interview and telling them about the project was a taxing process. Surprisingly little is written about this in standard texts.

(Walmsley 1998:129)

She continues:

..people taking part were contacted and briefed through intermediaries. This meant that I was not fully in control of the circumstances in which people were approached, with problematic results.

(Walmsley 1998:129)

Several young men were 'lost' in the gatekeeping process, either due to the social worker not being able to make contact with the young father, or due to his circumstances changing, for example, being placed in custody. Although the process of contacting the young men was often frustrating and discouraging to me as a researcher, upon reflection it is possible to see how this protracted phase allowed young fathers to ignore the research if they wanted to. Ignoring a letter may have provide an easier way for a young person to decline to participate, rather than saying so explicitly to me or their social worker. I accepted that for some young fathers not replying was a form of informed rejection.

3.1.4. Obtaining informed consent

Inquiries involving human subjects should be based, as far as practicable, on the freely given informed consent of subjects.

(The Social Research Association v 2004)

As stated above I made initial contact with proposed participants by letter, including a return slip suggesting appropriate times for meeting. When I received a reply I took this as a further positive step towards informed consent. I then contacted the young man by telephone and talked to him about the research in general terms. Although all of the young men spoke English as their first language, I was aware that not all had the same level of understanding, especially as some of the young men were described by their social workers as having learning disabilities. Moreover, it also became apparent from some of the initial telephone conversations that not all of the young men could read or write. This influenced my approach regarding whether obtaining

written informed consent was realistic. The dilemma was that if some of the young men could not read or write, then by asking all of them to read and sign a piece of paper, I would not be really clear who had really read and understood what they were signing. In addition, for those participants with literacy difficulties there was also the potential for embarrassment or distress, which I clearly wanted to avoid.

Levels of maturity and understanding (Kellett and Ding 2004) are often cited as informal benchmarks for consent with research with young people. I, therefore, took the approach that informed consent was a process starting at the informal approach by the social worker and going on to the end of the interview. This is represented in Figure 2 below:

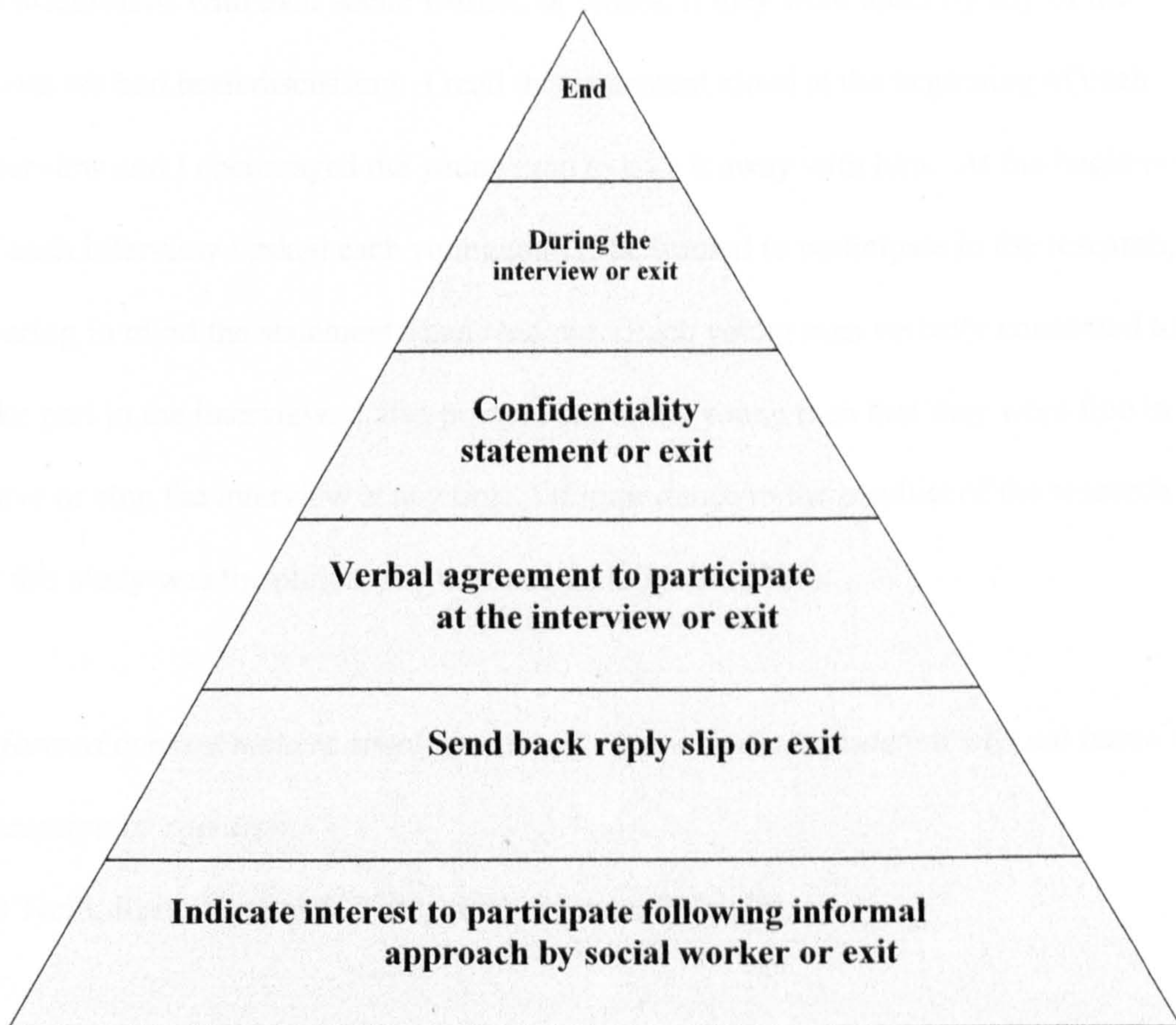


Figure 2. The Process of Informed Consent Adopted in this Study.

For the early interviews I did not take along a paper 'explanation' of the research, relying on my verbal introduction before I started the interview. However, I quickly became aware that this did not 'feel' right and introduced a short one-page reminder of the research, in addition to a statement about confidentiality (set out below) and some local and national contact numbers, should the young men want to have follow up discussions with their social worker, or others, if they were upset by any of the issues we had been discussing. I read this statement aloud at the beginning of each interview and I encouraged the young man to take it away with him. At the beginning of each interview I asked each young man if he wanted to participate in the research, bearing in mind the statement I had read out. Each young man verbally consented to take part in the interview. I also pointed out to the young men that they were free to leave or stop the interview at any time. Of importance to the conduct of the research in this study was the philosophy outlined by O'Neill (2002):

Informed consent matters simply because it shows that a transaction was not based on deception or coercion.

(O'Neill, Reith Lecture 5, 2002, cited in Fraser 2004:22)

It was equally important that the participants understood what was going to happen to the information and stories contained in their narrative interviews. I explained to all of them that I would be interviewing other participants, looking at all the interviews, studying them and writing and talking about their experiences. Most of the young men engaged with the idea that I was writing a 'book' and asked to be sent copies. Although I could not agree to this, I promised, where possible to send any articles either to them directly or through their social worker. To date I have kept this

promise. In addition, most of the young men liked the idea that I could not use their name and all of them chose a pseudonym to be used in the text. Unfortunately, I have had to alter some of their choices, particularly where some of the young men wanted to use the same name.

Throughout this study I engaged with the spirit of informed consent set out by Walmsley & Johnson (2003) that:

..for inclusive researchers informed consent must be more than a one off signing of a piece of paper worded in jargonistic language.

(Walmsley & Johnson 2003:158)

Although not professing to be conducting inclusive research, I was conducting reflexive research, allowing me the opportunity to engage with a young person on an individual level, checking with them that they understood, throughout the interview and re-checking that they wanted to continue if they became upset.

3.1.5. The pilot and initial interviews with young fathers

Three of the early interviews that I conducted were with young men who had been identified by their social workers as being 'at risk' of becoming young fathers due to previous contraceptive errors or lack of use. These three young men formed an initial 'pilot' for the study, particularly in relation to me as a researcher talking with young men. However, they are not referred to again in the wider thesis as the study is primarily about the transition to fatherhood.

I am aware that some of the first interviews I conducted with young men who were already fathers, due to them being the initial interviews with young *fathers*, should really have been regarded as part of a pilot. However, I quickly discovered, through these initial 'developmental' interviews, that each young man was different in their life experiences, their ability and willingness to talk, their manner, background and level of enthusiasm on the day. Some young men required more encouragement and work on my part than others to tell their stories. For this reason and due to the difficulty of gaining access to this group, I have included *all* the young fathers I interviewed, including the earlier ones, as part of the main data analysis. I have not afforded these interviews a different status within the overall analysis. My approach, outlined in Chapters Four, Five and Six, has been to be as reflexive as possible with the content of *all* the interviews with young fathers, reflecting on both our parts in the interviews at whatever stage the young men were interviewed. This theme is particularly illustrated in Chapter Four through the example of the interview with Stuart, where I reflect on my role as a researcher, past social worker, mother and human being. In addition, as a researcher I valued all the interviews and the contribution made by all of the young fathers and felt it inappropriate to give certain interviews, for example the 'better' ones, where a young man talked easily and without interruption, a different status. All the young fathers had stories to tell, told them in a different way, and reacted to me differently. My development as a researcher, therefore, is part of the ongoing transparency of the study and is reflected in the interviews with all the participants.

3.1.6. 'In keeping with your conscience'¹: issues of confidentiality

As previously stated the confidentiality and protection of the participants' identities was ensured by using their choice of pseudonyms. More challenging, however, was the framework for the confidentiality of the information gained in the interviews, particularly pertaining to the disclosure of child protection issues. Social work researchers Bell and Nutt (2002) offer the following advice:

It is suggested that confidential information should only be disclosed with the consent of the client, except where there is clear evidence of serious danger to the client, worker, other persons or the community.

(Bell and Nutt 2002:73)

Confidentiality is tackled directly in the Open University ethical guidelines (2003) with the statement:

Researchers should protect the rights of participants between projects, guarding against dissemination of confidential information.

(Guidelines on Ethical Research 2003:3)

In the above document researchers are advised to 'exercise professional judgement and seek a solution that is in keeping with your conscience' (2003:3). Although not aware of this statement at the time, this philosophy turned out to be a central theme in

¹ From the Open University 'Guidelines on Ethical Research' (2003)

this study, particularly in relation to some of the stories the young men told. These difficult issues which occurred during the process of the research are explored in greater depth in Chapter Four.

Initially I decided to explain my policy on confidentiality to the young men immediately before the start of the interview and prior to asking them if they wanted to participate in the interview. I prepared a statement, therefore, influenced by that used by Frosh *et al* (2001) in their study with teenage boys. Originally the statement read:

I would like to ask you questions about your experiences, your personal relationships and your unique experiences of being a young father. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; it is your experiences that I am interested in. I hope you will be able to answer these questions as freely as possible. If there is something you do not wish to talk about, then let me know and then we will stop. Your answers will be used as part of my research and your name will be changed.

This statement was designed to reinforce the concept of informed consent by reminding the participants of the territory of the study. Bearing in mind the limited reading skills of some of the young men, I read the statement out to them all and, using verbal and non-verbal strategies, satisfied myself that they had understood. On more than one occasion I read the statement out twice.

However, following some of the early interviews it became apparent that this introduction to and contextualisation of the research was inadequate. In particular, I

felt it did not outline clearly enough the possible consequences of some of the information that the participants might reveal. This was another ingredient in ensuring the young men really understood what they were participating in. Specifically, some of the young men in the 'pilot' interviews had been sexually explicit and I wanted a framework to deal with any potentially difficult 'revelations'. I consequently decided to *add* to the above statement the following:

You will be aware that I am interested in your views on being a parent and this may include both good and bad aspects. Most of the information that you tell me will remain confidential and anonymous, however, if you tell me about things that involve hurting or neglecting children or breaking the law, I may encourage you to seek further help and advice or I may be responsible myself for passing this information on to your social worker or health visitor.

There seems to be a particular tension in the use of narrative interviews and this will be explored throughout the thesis. By definition narrative interviews encourage participants to tell a story. On the one hand, inviting a young father to give his subjective definition could include issues which are difficult for the researcher to contextualise or handle. As service users, some of these young men had been victims and/or perpetrators of abuse and in the following chapters elements of this will come through. On the other hand as a researcher I wanted the participants to understand the boundaries of confidentiality and appreciate what they were consenting to.

3.2. The participants

In total the study includes interviews with 16 young men, who had just become, or were about to be, fathers. The details of the participants, including their age, the team they were referred from, the ages and number of their biological children and the place where the interview was conducted, are set out in Figure 3. The three young men who were interviewed for the pilot are also included in this.

The young men in the study were aged between 15 and 24, with the majority aged 21 and under and all were white. Three young men were described either by themselves during the interview or by their social workers prior to the interview as having learning disabilities and over half had offended in the past. Precise details of the biographical profiles of the young men included in this study are set out in Appendix A.

Figure 3. Ages, sources of referral, place of interview and children of the participants

Key:

YOT – Youth Offending Team

LC – Leaving Care team

C+F – Children and Families Team

NAME	TEAM INVOLVED	CHILD/REN	PLACE OF INTERVIEW
<i>Sean</i>	<i>16+ Team</i>	<i>NO CHILD- PILOT</i>	<i>Office</i>
<i>Jason (16)</i>	<i>16+ Team</i>	<i>NO CHILD – PILOT</i>	<i>Office</i>
<i>Harry (16)</i>	<i>YOT</i>	<i>NO CHILD – PILOT</i>	<i>Office</i>
1) JOHN (17)	YOT/LC Team	One child (8m)	Office
2) SHAUN (19)	Family Centre/C+F Team	(One child 2yrs) + father in waiting	Office
3) DANIEL (18)	YOT	Two children (4yrs,9m)	Home
4) DWAYNE (17)	YOT/C+F	One child (6m)	Office
5) ANDY (21)	Family Centre	One child (6m)	Home
6) MARK (18)	Family Centre/Disabilities Team	Two children (2yrs, 1m – deceased) & father in waiting	Office
7) MANUEL (22)	Family Centre/C+F	Two children (2&3 yrs)	Home
8) KEITH (19)	YOT/C+F Team	One child (4m)	Home
9) ADAM (16)	YOT	One child (1 day old)	Prison Cell
10) BEN (19)	Family Centre	One child (8m) + father in waiting	Home
11) PETER 1 (24)	Family Centre	One child (> 1yr)	Home
12) PAUL (24)	Family Centre	One child (2yrs)	Home
13) JAY P (19)	Family Centre	One child (4m)	Home
14) LUKE (15)	YOT/C+F Team	Father in waiting	Office
15) VICTOR (16)	YOT	Father in waiting	Office
16) STUART (17)	C+ F Team /Family Centre	Two children (3yrs, 5m)	Home

3.2.1. How the interviews were conducted

I personally conducted all of the interviews. I began the interviews by describing the purpose of the research and explained the themes I would be interested in exploring. I also showed the young men the tape recorder and told them that all the interviews were being recorded, as I could not possibly represent their stories accurately by writing them down. I explained that all the tapes would be transcribed and the tapes destroyed. The research interviews lasted between forty minutes to an hour depending upon the circumstance of the young man, the time he was available, the context of the interview, for example, whether at his home or in an interview room within a social services office.

3.2.2. Interview settings

Where possible I tried to conduct the interviews in the young person's home environment as I felt this would encourage him to feel more at ease.

I also appreciated, as Kellett and Ding (2004) point out, that although young people are more responsive to the interview situation than young children, they do not always find it easy to talk to adults for protracted periods of time and in some of the interviews concentration spans and interest levels waned.

Six of the interviews were conducted at local social services departments, in offices I managed to secure for this use, one in a police cell and nine in the young man's home. The choice of location was often led by the inclination of the young man, but also by practical considerations. For example, one participant, Adam, was in police custody

so this inevitably influenced the location. Also, some of the participants suggested that as they were coming to see their social worker, they would be available to see me afterwards, so I booked an office to carry out the interview.

Over half of the interviews, however, were conducted in the young man's home. As a researcher, I generally preferred this option as it enabled me to see the young man in his home territory as well as often enabling me to meet his partner and baby prior to the interview. However, having previously been a social worker I was aware of potential hazards which can occur with vulnerable young people. The Social Research Association highlights the potential hazards for individuals engaging in social research:

Some research activities may place the researcher in the field in some degree of extra risk of physical/mental harm....All research entailing direct contact with the public presents a risk potential.

(The Social Research Association 2003)

As previously stated, some of the young men who consented to participate in the research were convicted offenders, some for violent offences of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and Greivous Bodily Harm (GBH). Others were fathers whose children were on the Child Protection Register. These were all families with whom social work professionals were dealing on a regular basis. During discussions with social work gatekeepers, it was decided that young fathers or families would not be considered where two professionals usually attended. This screening formed an additional part of the gate keeping process by social workers, impacting on the 'type' of young father I spoke to and, as previously mentioned, it can be speculated that there are a further

group of young fathers who have stories to tell, but where issues of the researcher's personal safety would need further consideration

In addition, some of the neighbourhoods where the young men lived were disadvantaged and had a high police presence, especially during the evening. I tried to avoid visiting these areas during the evening. Other strategies I employed were:

- Ensuring others (the social worker and my husband) knew of the location and the timing of the interview
- Taking a mobile phone with me
- Parking my car in a well lit area of the neighbourhood
- Having a pre-arranged sentence to say on the telephone if I was in trouble

Being in the home environment of a young father had an impact on how the interview was conducted, particularly as the interview was more likely to be interrupted by people and day-to-day events, as well as sometimes a lack of suitable space to conduct the interview. Although most of these interruptions and practical details were overcome with good humour and adaptation, some of the more extreme examples have been used for discussion in Chapter Four. Generally, however, the mother and child often went into another room, and the tape recorder was set up, mostly, in the front room or kitchen. Several of the interviews were carried out in social services offices and although the interruptions were less frequent, I was aware of the sterile, often impersonal environment, which may have affected the interaction.

At the end of each interview I thanked the young man, and reminded him of the sheet he could take, which had contact phone numbers and addresses of people and organisations. Directly following the interview I made some notes, jotting down my own thoughts and feelings in a journal which became my research diary and these reflections are used throughout the thesis. On one occasion, following the interview with Stuart, I sat in my car and cried as I had been so upset by his circumstances, which are explored further in Chapter Four.

Shortly after all the interviews I listened to the tapes and transcribed them myself, with the exception of three interviews which were transcribed at the Open University.

3.2.3. How the data was analysed

The 16 interviews were all transcribed verbatim with pauses of longer than five seconds acknowledged in the transcripts with brackets and five dots in the text [.....]. As Silverman (2000) points out, analysis of discourse can take many different shapes, from the sequential organisation of talk in interaction of conversation analysis to the cultural and social concerns of discourse analysis. As Chapter Two highlighted, the focus in this study is not on the minutiae of the mechanics of conversations between myself and the young men, but the overall shape of the narratives and individual episodes or stories within it.

Silverman (2000) further points out that there are a variety of methods which can be used when analysing qualitative data. The approach taken to the analysis in this study was to draw on a number of inter-related techniques.

Initially, I read the transcribed interviews several times with the aim of identifying key themes from the stories. These themes were noted on the transcripts and categories, largely following the themes of the 'aide memoire', built up. I also used Microsoft Word to facilitate a word search in the transcripts for several key words. Silverman (2000) points out that this approach draws on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) whereby common categories are identified from the data and constantly compared (Silverman 2000). These categories are then used to compare and contrast the data.

The underlying focus of the research was to analyse the similarities and differences in the way the young men told their stories: for example, as previously discussed in Chapter Two, whether they framed their lives either progressively or negatively or in any other way (Gergen 1994). I consequently analysed the transcripts for specific segments or chunks of 'stories' about a particular issue or subject, looking for similarities in the way the stories were told (positive or negative) relating to specific subjects. McCormack (2004) identifies that there are differing ways of analysing narrative accounts; analysis of narrative and narrative analysis. Analysis of narrative, she argues, is where researchers seek stories as data and then analyse these stories for themes across the whole narrative. Narrative analysis is rather where 'researchers gather descriptions of actions and events' and then these are used to generate stories through 'emplotment'. McCormack (2004) introduces a further form of analysis which is 'storying stories' whereby she 'seeks personal experience stories and generates stories by composing stories about those experiences' (2004:220).

Chapter Two outlines the range of approaches to narrative methodologies and points out that the approach taken in this research was influenced by the theoretical approaches of Gergen (1994), Reissman (1994) and Harre and Van Langenhove (1999). Analysis of the research in terms of Gergen's work therefore involved the transcripts being evaluated in terms of the whole co-constructed narrative or 'narrative analysis' in McCormack's terms; looking for beginnings, middles and endings, narrators, plots settings and characters (Denzin 2000). Positioning theory was used by looking at who the young men talked about and how they placed them in terms of other people and events (Harre and Van Languenhove 1999). Moreover, 'analysis of the narrative' (McCormack 2004) involved looking at individual, discrete stories or episodes within the overall transcript, looking for commonalities and differences and themes and 'interconnections' that recur between these episodes. This form of analysis concurs with Reissman's (1994) approach of analysing data around personal troubles or crisis. Indeed Reissman (1993) identifies that discrete stories are recognisable from the surrounding text by having a clear beginning and an end, with the point of the story linked chronologically. The point of the story and the evaluation is from the perspective of how the teller 'wants to be understood' (1993:20) rather than as a 'direct unproblematic representation of the empirical event and experiences to which they refer' (MacDonald and Marsh 2005:44). Both of these approaches were used in the analysis of the data, allowing for the analysis of discrete individual stories or episodes within the larger overall narrative. In addition, the transcripts were evaluated in terms of my role as the researcher, looking at how I positioned and interacted with the young men and how they positioned me.

Consequently in terms of use of language within this thesis 'narratives' are taken to mean the *whole* interaction between myself and the young man and these have been looked at in terms of how progressive, stable or regressive the story was (Gergen 1994). On the other hand, stories or episodes are taken to mean discrete sections within the whole narrative where incidents, crisis or 'atrocious stories' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) are specifically tackled by the young man and where they can be contrasted or compared thematically with similar episodes from other young men.

It is acknowledged, however, as MacDonald and Marsh point out in their study, within these analytical processes that there 'hides a complicated unobservable process whereby we necessarily gave priority to some interview extracts rather than others' (2005:44) possibly connected to space and interpretation by myself.

Furthermore as McCormack (2004) outlines, the reader then brings their own reconstructive process to the analysis:

A further level of reconstruction occurs as the reader reads and reacts to the experience. Knowledge constructed through this process is recognised as being situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterised by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings. It values transformation at a personal level, individual subjectivity and the researcher voice.

(McCormack 2004:220)

Analysis by the reader will, therefore, further construct and reconstruct the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPLIED ETHICS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

4.0. INTRODUCTION

As the previous chapter has set out, the research described in this thesis was undertaken within a clear ethical framework aiming to make ongoing ‘judgements in context’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), dealing with practical and ethical issues as they arose and using a reflexive approach (D’Cruz and Jones 2004). The research was conducted with a keen sense of the ethics surrounding access to and working with vulnerable young people including the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, possible harm and coercion. Reflexivity was also a key factor in the research process, by scrutinizing my reactions to events as they unfolded and reflecting on and writing about them at a later date, as well as acknowledging the impact of my own presence and behaviour in the interviews.

The specific focus of this chapter, therefore, is on exploring these issues of process. Initially this may appear a luxury as this seems to cover ground set out in the previous chapter. However, the last chapter set out my planned approach, whereas this chapter reflects on the processes experienced during the research. It therefore contributes to the transparency of the research process and sets the context for analysing the ‘findings’. As D’Cruz and Jones (2004) argue, however, adopting a reflexive approach is not always easy as ‘this kind of approach to research can make life

difficult' (2004:11) as it can be critical of both the researcher and the research. Being self-critical is not easy in the context of setting out a well-researched and informed thesis. However, without grappling with the ethical and practical difficulties which arose during the study and adopting a reflexive approach, the study would make a very different contribution to knowledge.

Curtis *et al* (2004) state that although there is a literature on interviewing marginalised groups, for example, 'difficult' to reach children (disabled children, homeless young people, care leavers), often 'hidden' is a description of the practicalities of interviewing these young people. They remark:

..we were unable to find described detailed experiences of others, from which we might have drawn practical lessons, or reassurance that our experiences were not unusual. Is every researcher a friend to the kids, and every child, or every child reported a real trouper?

(Curtis *et al* 2004:168)

This chapter is a contribution to this discussion of the practicalities and ethics of interviewing socially excluded young fathers; it has three main sections. Firstly, attention will focus on communication issues which arose from interviewing the young fathers in the study in the way I did. I have used the term communication here to cover the interactions in the interviews between myself and the participants as well as the influence the context of the interviews had in encouraging and hindering communication. The second section analyses the ethics of the research, particularly in relation to the personal and professional tensions I encountered during some of the

interviews, including the tensions arising from a sense that I was drawing on different discursive frameworks from those used by the young men. Finally, the chapter will draw on one of the earlier interviews, with Andy, in order to explore issues and boundaries of confidentiality.

4.1. Communication issues

4.1.1. Narrative interviews

As stated in Chapter Three, sixteen young fathers were interviewed for this research project. The young men varied in how they responded to and engaged in the interview situation. Some young men, for example Andy, Peter, Paul, Mark, Manuel, Jay and Victor were extremely talkative and, from a narrative researcher's perspective, responsive and co-operative. When analysing the type of responses gained during the interviews, this returns to an issue raised in Chapter Three regarding the use of pilot interviews in this study. All of the interviews with young fathers varied, with a mixture of 'good' and 'bad' narrative interviews across all stages of the study. Although 'good' and 'bad' narrative interviews are difficult to define, returning to the commonalities outlined in Chapter Two, a 'good' interview was described as including the telling of a story or stories over time (Denzin 2000) (with structure, plots and characters emerging as the stories developed) and within these stories individual characters would be positioned (Harre and Van Langenhove 1999). In addition, as Mishler (1986) comments, responses should be unstructured. Applying the first two criteria, all of the interviews with the young fathers could be deemed as being 'successful' as they all involved, to a greater or lesser degree, descriptions of

the transition to young fatherhood and the positioning of themselves and others. However, some of the overall narratives and the episodes or stories within them were disjointed and jumped from subject to subject and also required a great deal of intervention from me. Alldred and Gillies (2002) argue that although these types of experiences can be unexpected and unsettling for the interviewer, they can be useful as firstly, an unexpected response allows the interviewer to reflect on their expectations regarding the behaviour of participants in the interview situation. Secondly, they suggest that not obtaining what you expect is a crucial part of the analysis:

If interviewees do not perform as a reflexive subject or narrate themselves earnestly through a confessional, self-conscious discourse we might feel disrespected and that they are not taking the interview seriously. The surprises or awkwardness can generate important insights when it comes to recognising difference.

(Alldred and Gillies 2002:156)

In the light of this observation it is important to reflect that some young men struggled with giving lengthy responses and consequently some excerpts from their overall narratives appear more like edited highlights. As Hollway and Jefferson (2001) point out, individuals vary in their ability to tell stories, calling into question the assumption that narrative approaches are universally applicable (Leiblich *et al* 1998; Gray *et al* 2002). The stories constructed during the narrative interviews in this study were the result of a joint composition and factors between us, in the interview and also related to the context of the interview, encouraged or reduced the story-telling opportunities.

In addition, the participants also had to want to tell their stories and be willing to do this with me.

To explain this further, two of the 'best' examples of narrative interviews were with Andy, conducted in the first half of the study, and Paul, carried out later on in the research. These young fathers required very little prompting from me as an interviewer and they appeared to enjoy narrating their experiences. For example, Andy was one of the easiest young men to interview as he talked fluently. I interviewed him in his small bedsit, sitting with him on the bed as there was nowhere else to sit. I felt relaxed with Andy, 21, during most of the interview and warmed to him as a person (research diary). Below is an episode typical of his interview where he is describing the birth of his daughter:

Episode 1

Jane: Were you around?

Andy: I was in the room, you know holding Annie's hand like, you know. I saw bits that I shouldn't have because the curtain came down a bit and I was feeling really ill, you know because I've heard the noise and looked and I could see because the curtain had moved a little bit and I saw some blood and where the incision was and the baby coming out and my stomach was really churning, I mean I'm not a wimpy sort of guy but that did make me want to heave and I was feeling quite dizzy. But then I heard her cry and my emotions were so high I cried and cried.

Jane: I can tell, emotional.

Andy: It was just such a wonderful day, and I was, the midwife finally rose, a lovely midwife, she asked me to come up and help weigh her and clean her up and I got to feed her, her first bottle. And I had to go to Annie and say, 'can I feed her first. Can I please? Can I go? And she said 'yes, go just go, I'm alright.' So I went and fed her, her first bottle and Annie, when she was wheeled out after she had been sewn up, tried to hold her but she couldn't because she was still very weak. She cried as well and I cried and when Annie was a bit more with it and the baby was all right and wrapped up and cleaned up on the trolley, I pushed the baby back to the ward with Annie, following her, and I was in you know the blues stuff they put you in, the gown and the hat, and my Mum and my friend Sally were down the bottom, were down the bottom of the hallway, the other side of the door and they basically said 'no, no that can't be them. It is them. No it's not, it looks too smart to be Andrew' you know. But then they saw Annie and realised it was me and I asked the midwife, after she double checked the baby was alright again, if I could wheel the baby down to the door. My mum cried.

Andy is describing a hugely personal and intimate event and one which obviously fills him with great pride. In addition, he apparently wants to talk about it. He paints a picture of himself as looking smart in his blue 'scrubs' fresh from the operating theatre and wheeling out his new baby daughter to show his mother. This is a lovely, moving narrative from a new father.

Similarly, Paul, 24, was easy to interview responding to questions from me, with many pages of talk (see Appendix D for an example). However, although his

generally uninterrupted narrative produced many different stories, characters and plots, the interview did produce many pages of information not really needed for the study (Reissman 1994).

The 'successful' interviews of Andy and Paul took place at different stages of the research process and lead me to analyse factors other than the position of the interview in the overall study effecting how the interview went. Indeed it can be speculated that many features influenced how a young man responded in the interview situation. For example, age and maturity (Paul and Andy were two of the 'older' fathers, in their twenties), the young fathers' mood 'on the day' and their readiness to share their story. Moreover, as Jones (1998:50) remarks, 'some people agree to be interviewed because they are nice people' and because they want to help. One young man, Jay, remarked along these lines, 'I'll tell you everything, it don't bother me'. In addition, the young fathers may have been influenced by how they perceived and reacted to me and how willing they were to talk to a female researcher of a certain age, ethnicity and perceived class.

Unlike Andy and Paul, some of the other participants did not respond fluently in the interview and their stories were short and interspersed with frequent (sometimes inappropriate) interruptions from me. For example, in the episode below I am asking Shaun, 19, about the birth of his daughter. In comparison to Andy above (Episode 1). I did not feel comfortable with Shaun (research diary). I had been told by his social worker that he had been violent towards his partner and, as I stood at the front door, I could see that it had been smashed. When I went into Shaun's house I could also see that some of the internal doors had been kicked and shattered (research diary) making

me even more on edge and conjuring up unsubstantiated images of violence. I did not relax with Shaun and the interview is frequently interspersed with short, closed sections of conversation. In addition, Shaun tells me how he was not at the birth of his child, but that his partner's ex-boyfriend had accompanied her to the hospital, a slightly difficult and perhaps uncomfortable situation for him to explain and, in terms of a narrative interview, in direct contrast to Andy's story discussed previously:

Episode 2

Jane: So why was her ex there then?

Shaun: Because he was staying with her at her Dad's, coz he had nowhere to go at the time and like he took her up the hospital.

Jane: Was he there at the birth?

Shaun: No just there, then I went up there and she's already had the baby, she was-

Jane: What did she have?

Shaun: A little girl, Chelsea, seven and a half weeks premature she was.

Jane: Was she?

Shaun: Yeah.

[.....Pause 7 seconds]

Jane: Were you worried?

Shaun: I was at first but like then the doctors and nurses kept making sure there was nothing wrong with her and she'd be OK.

Unlike the story of the birth of Andy's baby, where I felt we 'connected' with each other in a positive co-construction, the interview with Shaun appeared to be affected by different factors, represented in the diagram below (Figure 4):

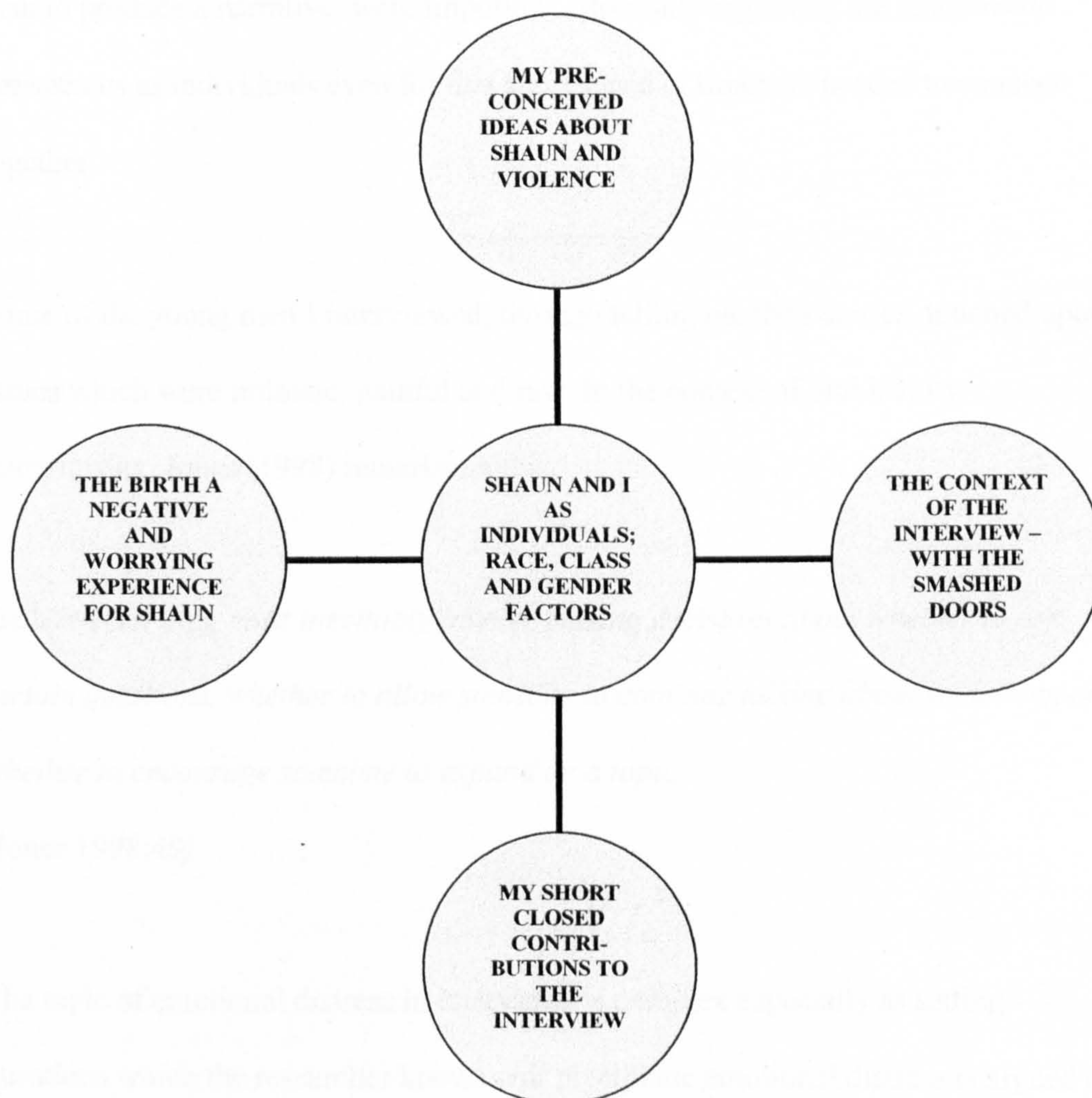


Figure 4. Factors affecting the interview with Shaun.

The above factors interacted to produce a version of a story told in a particular way between Shaun and myself, not ultimately conducive to a flowing narrative interview.

The narrative interviews, in their most basic forms, were interactions between a young father and a researcher. The interviews produced a 'knowledge' which was influenced by the context and two individuals with our own life-worlds, preconceived ideas and experiences. For the content of the interview to move beyond a basic interview additional ingredients, other than my desire to know and want the young man to produce a narrative, were important, especially regarding the relationship between us as individuals even for that short space of time: we needed to connect together.

Some of the young men I interviewed, through telling me their stories, touched upon issues which were intimate, painful and raw. In the context of oral history interviewing, Jones (1998) remarks on this:

Such interviewing must inevitably involve making decisions about whether to ask certain questions, whether to allow someone to continue talking about something or whether to encourage someone to expand on a topic.

(Jones 1998:49)

The topic of emotional distress in interviews is complex especially as setting questions which the researcher knows will precipitate emotional distress is argued to be unethical (Jones 1998). This was not an approach I undertook or pursued in the interviews, as I felt my role as a researcher was not to cause obvious distress, although I acknowledge that encouraging a young man who was also a service user to tell stories about his life could result in him reflecting on past abuse or other difficult issues. Moreover, there were occasions when I challenged him and asked him to

explain further. The fact that the interviewees had become fathers at an early age meant that it was likely that emotive family issues would be touched upon. I decided therefore, prior to the interviews, to respond as sensitively as possible, checking if the participant was happy and if necessary offering the option of stopping the interview or moving on to something else if this occurred. This only happened three times, in the interviews with Jay, Adam and with Paul. I felt that these moments were very much part of the continuum of informed consent discussed in Chapter Three. Participants needed to make ongoing decisions about what they told me in the interview and what they continued to talk about. The young men also had the opportunity of referring to the sheet I left behind at the end of the interview on organisations to contact if they felt upset by any of the issues we had discussed. An example of this ongoing striving for informed consent can be seen in the interview with Jay, 19, where he is describing how anxious he gets. His partner Hazel had just come into the room to retrieve a toy for the baby:

Episode 3

Jay: I think I'm very anxious, just like now I'm sitting here, like jerking my leg. It's anxious isn't it? I've always been like that, ain't I Hazel? I sit there for an hour constantly and it's, I don't know.

Jane: There's no need to feel anxious now you know, because you don't have to tell me what you don't want to tell me.

Jay: No, no, yeah. I'll tell you everything, it don't bother me as long as, well you know it, ain't it.

Jay seems to want to relay how anxious he gets in order to contextualise how he is talking. By telling him that he does not need to feel anxious and talk about issues he does not want to, I am reminding him of his ongoing option to select out of the interview or topic of conversation. Bell and Nutt (2002) reflect on dealing with the dilemma of participants becoming upset, drawing on Nutt's research with foster parents:

Although enabling people to behave in an emotional manner is familiar territory to a social worker or counsellor, Linda Nutt decided not to reflect back to carers in their interviews any statements in a way that might encourage them to examine strong and painful emotions.

(Bell and Nutt 2002:80)

4.2. Tensions between multifaceted roles

As Bell and Nutt (2002) state above, although considering how to deal with strong emotions from participants is important, the feelings and emotions of the researcher also need to be acknowledged. Part of the reflexive process for me as a researcher was recognising the experience of role transition. Mauthner and Doucet comment on the emotional responses that conducting difficult interviews can have for the researcher:

Within discussions of reflexivity, attention is often drawn to the importance of recognising the social location of the researcher as well as the ways in which our

emotional responses to respondents can shape our interpretations of their accounts.

(Mauthner and Doucet 2003:418)

They suggest that as part of the process of analysing the data, one reading of the transcripts should be specifically for 'reader response' whereby the researcher reads him-or- herself into the text, evaluating the narrative on his or her own terms, listening to how he or she responds emotionally and intellectually to the other person.

This approach was a part of my development as a reflexive researcher. I read the transcripts many times, reflecting on my role and contribution and speculating how I could have handled a situation in a different way with a particular participant.

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) acknowledge the peculiarities of our personal biographies, and how our past experiences and current situation often influence our interactions and the positions we take up. Specifically, the interview with Stuart, outlined below, exemplifies the importance of acknowledging and exploring personal biographies and how past experiences can affect how research is carried out and the researcher's response. Indeed as Mauthner and Doucet (2003) emphasise, researchers need to be more self-conscious and explicit about their part in the research process.

4.2.1. The interview with Stuart

I found the interview with Stuart, 17, (described by his social worker as having learning disabilities) particularly distressing due to the poverty of the circumstances in which he, his partner and children were living. On returning home from the interview I wrote my own narrative in my research diary, detailed below, to de-brief me and to be used for supervision. My identities as a researcher, an ex-practitioner, a mother

and a human being can be seen to be at variance during my reflective account of the events I witnessed and experienced.

I was due to have two interviews with young men who had recently become fathers; Stuart was the first that day. He is 17 with two children, one aged 3 and the other 5 months and lives with his partner aged 19 in a 2 bed roomed house. I was made aware by the social worker involved with the family that both the children were on the at risk register and I reflected on this as I drove to the housing estate where he lived, described as one of the most deprived in the South. The house appeared derelict from the outside, with the front door partially kicked in and some of the front windows puckered where stones had been thrown.

The downstairs part of the house had two rooms, a front room and a kitchen. The only furniture in the front room was a TV and a Playstation. Both children were in the room with their mum and a few toys. The floor was covered with nappies, some soiled and some wet. I suggested to Stuart that we go into the kitchen for the interview so we would not disturb the children. In the kitchen there was a cooker, a washing machine with dirty washing on the floor and a fridge. There was nowhere to sit, so we sat on the floor. There were lots of animal droppings on the floor around the fridge and the cooker. Two mice joined us for part of the interview. It was cold and uncomfortable and the smell was awful.

When the interview was finished I thanked him. I found it very difficult to walk away from the children and the mess in the house and I felt I wanted to help tidy up. I asked Stuart if he would like some help 'clearing away the nappies'. He said yes. We

cleared them up. I asked about the mice, he said that all the houses in the estate had them and some had rats. I asked him if he minded if I mentioned my concerns about the mice to his social worker. He said 'no'. He also said that the house was condemned and they were due to move, but had no date.

This example is interesting as it goes beyond the concerns of the methodological approach i.e. conducting a narrative interview, but focuses upon the distress for the researcher of conducting research with such a deprived and socially excluded group of young people.

Writing my thoughts and feelings in the research diary served a number of different purposes. My written narrative indicates the tensions I felt being an active researcher and adapting to the environment and circumstances I found myself in, far removed from my usual day-to-day experiences in a university. I was also trying to acclimatise to a level of extreme poverty and disadvantage that I had not encountered before as a researcher, or for a number of years as a social worker. In addition, as a researcher I was trying to build rapport (Duncombe and Jessop 2002) with a young man with learning disabilities I had not met before, and practically trying to select a place in his house that was suitable to interview him, away from the children and near a socket for the tape recorder. The interaction described above produces a tension for me in the blurring of boundaries between myself as a researcher, a professional social worker, a mother and a human being, with each identity shaped by past and existing discourses.

The intricacy and overlapping of my roles is demonstrated in my written narrative account with Stuart. Near the end of my account I ask him if he minds me mentioning

my concerns about the mice to his social worker. My professional and human concerns about his family circumstances are competing with my primary role in this situation as a researcher. In the above extract I reflect on asking him for his permission to take the matter further and act as an advocate about his appalling living circumstances, and he gives this permission to me. Although I asked Stuart this when the interview had been completed, I was concerned with his living conditions throughout the interview and how best to tackle it with him, and this may have affected how I engaged with him as a researcher. Unfortunately, although we conducted the interview twice (as the equipment failed during the interview), analysis of the data and my impact on it has not been possible.

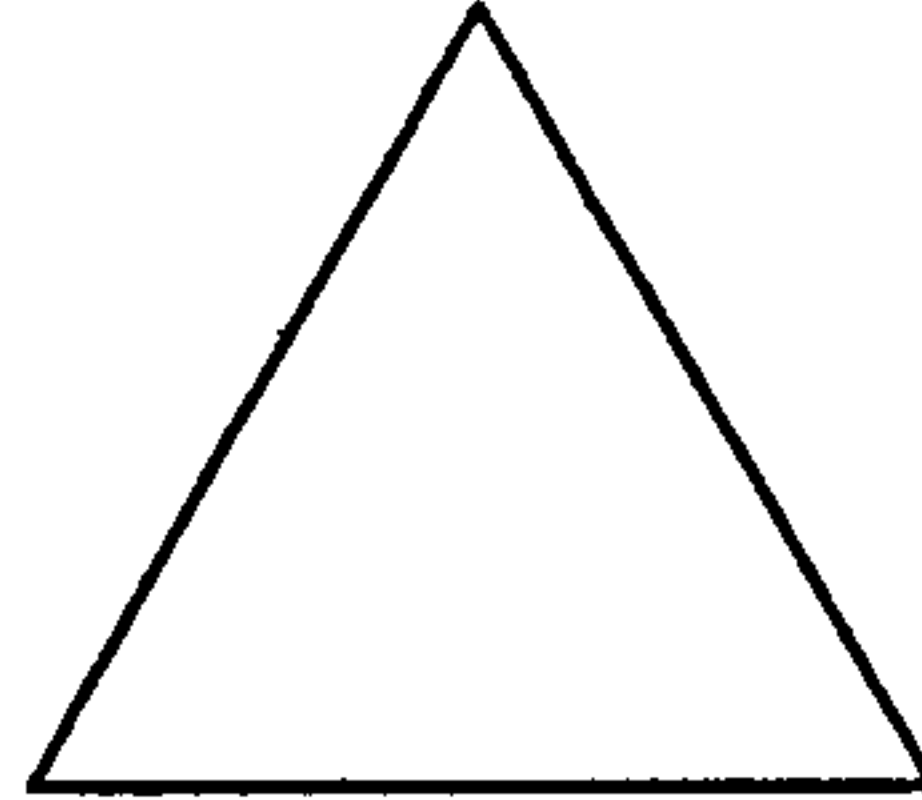
Miller (2000) states that both participants bring pre-existing agendas to the interview situation:

A narrative analysis can be thought of as having a triangular structure. One apex of the triangle is the respondent with their pre-existing subjective and negotiated view of social reality. A second apex of the triangle is the interviewer with an agenda of research interests and goals. The responses to the interviewer's questioning produce the third apex of the triangle.

(Miller 2000:130).

Miller (2001) represents this diagrammatically in Figure 5 below:

Respondent with pre-existing subjectivity



**Interviewer-
with research agenda
and goals.**

Responses to questions.

Miller suggests that the top of the triangle relates to the interview participant, in this case Stuart, with his view of social reality. The lower left-hand point in Miller's analysis would relate to me as the interviewer with my own research aims, one of which is to conduct a 'successful' narrative research interview with Stuart. Miller describes the right hand corner of the diagram as relating to the co-constructed responses generated from the research interview.

This initially appears to be a constructive interpretative framework for some of the dynamics in the interview situation between Stuart, with his own agency and subjectivity and me, the researcher, with my own agenda and goals. However, I would argue that the interview situation is more complex than Miller suggests. I have exemplified this in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Role discrepancy in social work research: factors of influence.

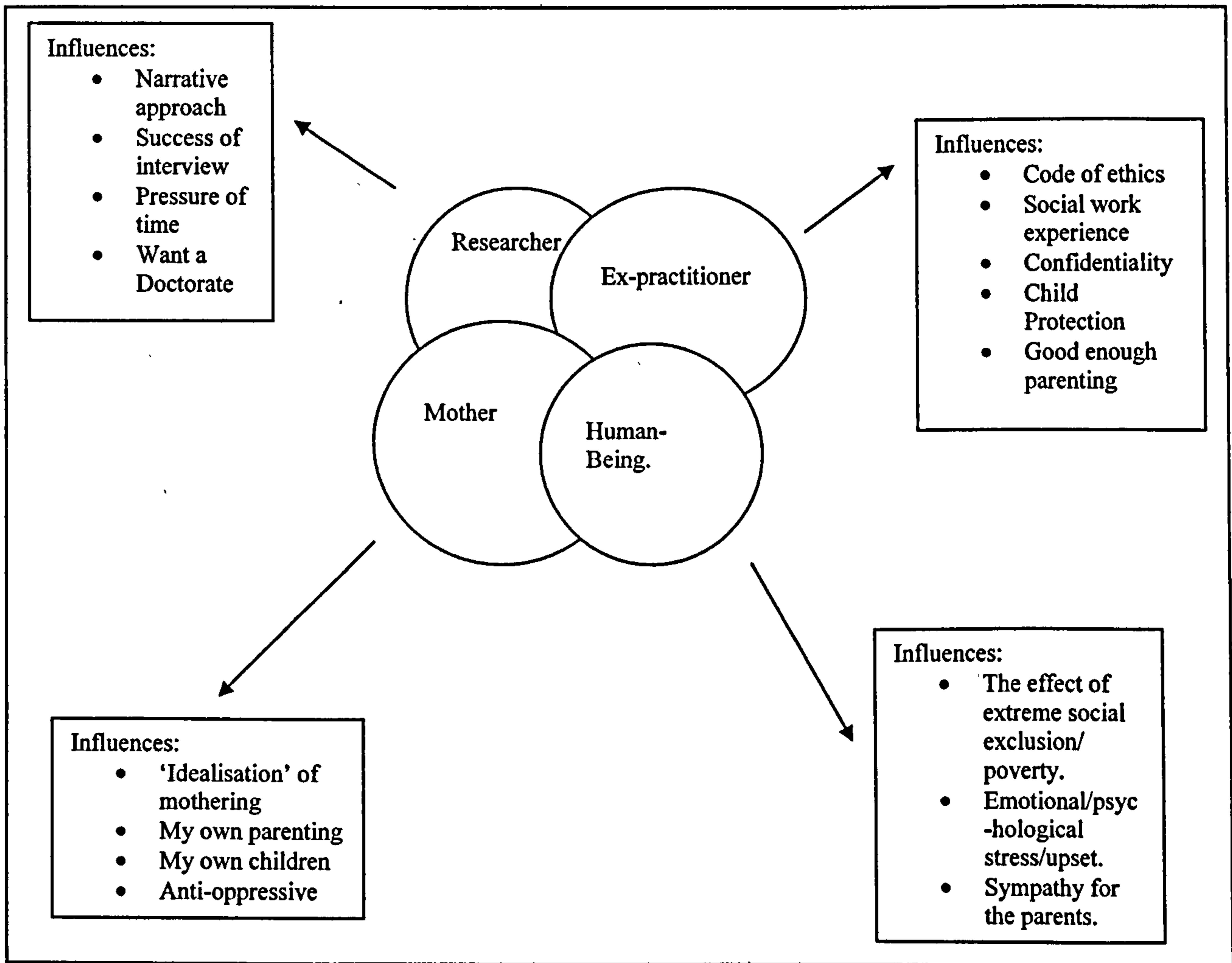


Figure 6 illustrates some of the different frameworks I am influenced by and am interacting with. For example, as a researcher my agenda is shaped by wanting to be an 'ideal' researcher (Birch and Jessop 2002) as well as a 'committed and responsible' one (2002:4) who is carrying out ethically informed research, ensuring informed consent. I am also concerned with completing the interview and being aware of the power relationship between myself and Stuart as well as my own research goals (Duncombe and Jessop 2002). With regard to gender and age, I was old enough to be his mother and this may affect his perception of and responses to me, as well as my view of and responses to him. Also, as a former practitioner working with vulnerable families, I was additionally influenced by my own social work training, grounded in a welfarist framework of 'protecting children by recognising potentially dangerous parents' (Otway 1996:168) or dangerous environments. Arguably, I was also influenced by my experience of and view about 'good enough' parenting, with my own ideas of aspiring to be an ideal mother. As a mother and human being I felt keenly the emotional effects of the neglect I was witnessing in Stuart's house, with very young children being in such close proximity to mice, soiled nappies and dirt. On the other hand, as a mother I also understood how difficult it is to look after two small children.

In the situation described in the extract from my research diary, I try to resolve some of these personal and professional dilemmas by asking Stuart's permission to intervene and try to improve his circumstances. Less obvious are the consequences if Stuart had refused permission for me to report the mice and rats, and also if he had not agreed to tidy up the nappies. Indeed, perhaps the judgement made in the context of

his refusal would have been more far-reaching for us both and have challenged further the role tensions I was experiencing.

Although I felt better at a human level by transgressing the 'pure' researcher role and by considering the needs of Stuart's children, I had exerted my power by entering his house with one remit (to ask him about his experiences of being a young father) and by implicitly imposing my own on his living conditions, I had introduced another. In relation to this point, Jones (1998) highlights the emotional impact on the researcher of conducting and being a witness to distressing interviews. He comments on his feelings when he completed his research on families and mental illness:

It was very tiring and upsetting to do those distressing interviews. Perhaps it was also my own sense of guilt, to do with things that drew me to this kind of research in the first place – wanting to help people, which I felt in this context I could not.

(Jones 1998:54)

Using my experience as a former social worker, I assessed that the immediate situation with Stuart and his family was not a positive one for the children and wanted to help him to deal with it. Although I knew that social services were heavily involved with the family, I wanted to exert my own agency, making a clear contribution to the situation influenced by my own desire to help people. Reflecting on my reaction to Stuart's situation, the intervention was as much about meeting my needs and not just walking away as much as trying to help Stuart.

Ethical problems surrounding this role discrepancy, set out in Figure 6, also arose in some of the interviews in relation to racist and homophobic comments by a few of the participants, for example, in the interviews with Luke, Dwayne and Victor and Peter. In the episode below Peter, 24, acknowledges that his comments on different nationalities may be racist but continues to comment anyway. I am asking Peter where he would like to live:

Episode 4

Peter: Believe it or not I like the country. I don't like it here because it is a council estate, and I know it sounds racist or whatever. There is too many breeds in one place, you have got the Irish, Muslims, you have got Koreans as well and Bosnians and things like that. And just, there is 1500 houses on this estate and too many different religions.

I had not made provision to deal with either racist or homophobic comment prior to the study and consequently these situations compelled me to make a judgement at the time, which was to largely ignore the comments, taking a 'hands off' approach. For example, Luke described as 'poofs¹ or something', some men whom he had hit or had a fight with and who consequently report him to the police. Although I felt uncomfortable with this type of remark, I chose not to challenge or comment on them when they arose. My reasons for this were primarily focussed around the methodological spirit of the study, that is to say that I was inviting the young men to tell their own stories, in their own way, using their own language. As a researcher,

¹ A UK slang term generally agreed to mean a homosexual man.

had I repeatedly challenged the way they were phrasing or constructing situations I would have altered the spirit of their story. Moreover, I also felt uncomfortable at the time and it serves as a further example of a judgement that I needed to make in the context of each interview (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). As a researcher I was not there to change their behaviour, however in my role as a mother or social worker outside of the interview, I would have felt more comfortable challenging their use of words. However, this is also an example of the contradictions involved in social research (as well as being a further illustration of the importance of reflexivity in the research process) as I am aware that in the interview with Stuart and during some of the interviews discussed in Chapters Five and Six, I did transcend my purely research role and on occasions I did challenge the inconsistencies in the stories some of the young men told.

Frosh *et al* (2002) remark how racist comments occurred in one of their interviews, where a black boy was called 'monkey' by one of the participants. The researcher details how uncomfortable he felt responding to this and asking why the boy was called that:

I felt a little uncomfortable doing so as if I would undermine the camaraderie.

Clearly this was a racist name and it seemed inappropriate to be getting boys to admit they were being racist.

(Frosh *et al* 2002:42)

This example, and my own responses in some of the interviews, illustrates the difficult ethical territory that some social researchers are in, and the importance of an open, developmental approach to social research.

4.3. Context and risk

As previously mentioned, I was keen to interview as many of the young fathers as possible in their own homes, in order both to help them relax and to contextualise their circumstances. This proved invaluable in some interviews, particularly as I was often able to meet their partner and baby and also as in the episode with Stuart, the home context provided me with additional events and circumstances to reflect on as a researcher. At other times interviewing in a participants' home was challenging. In one part of the interview with Keith, 19, the events going on in his home were distracting and disconcerting.

Keith had a large family who all seemed interested in the interview and there were many people coming into and out of the main sitting room where the interview was being carried out, which may not have occurred had the interview been conducted in a social services office. On one occasion Keith and I were talking when his older brother came into the room. I knew from information provided by social services that Keith's brother was a heroin addict at the time of the interview. However, this had been discussed as part of the gatekeeping process and was felt to be safe for me to go in the home as lone practitioners often visited the family. Keith's brother appeared to me (although I could not be sure) to be holding a needle and I became increasingly agitated and uncomfortable whilst continuing to talk with Keith:

Episode 5

Jane: That's your brother is it?

Keith: Yeah.

Jane: Is that the younger one?

Keith: Older one.

Jane: That's the older one?

Keith: Yeah, the younger one's more years young and tall

Jane: You're not very tall are you?

Keith: No.

Jane: Sorry I've forgotten what we're talking about now.

One of the disadvantages of interviewing in participants' homes is that, as a researcher, you have little control over the environment or other people in it.

However organised one is, I found that, as a researcher, you need to be flexible and responsive to differing situations and people. It is apparent in the episode above with Keith that I am trying to keep the conversation going with him yet, trying not to appear distracted by his brother and what he was doing. Consequently, I make an inane comment about Keith's height because I am not concentrating on the interview. I did not want to get into dialogue with his older brother and consequently avoided all eye contact with him (research diary). Alldred and Gillies (2002) make the point that these types of situations which occur during the research process are where researchers need to reflect on their prior assumptions:

We can use our experiences of discomfort in interviews to reveal our expectations and assumptions and to generate understanding of how they might differ from participants.

(Aldred and Gillies 2002:155)

This situation with Keith's brother also exemplifies the vulnerability of the researcher in certain unforeseen contexts. Interviewing children and young people is not generally seen as being dangerous. Indeed as France (2004) points out, the emphasis with children and young people is that we, as researchers, may put them at risk:

we do need to think about physical spaces and places. Questions are raised for us about the types of venue and place we invite them to. We need to make sure we are not requiring young people to walk through dangerous neighbourhoods to get to a site where the research will be conducted.

(France 2004:185)

However, on occasions during the course of the interviews, I became aware that I was potentially exposing myself to risks. As in day-to-day social work practice, by going into the homes of the young men I was placing myself in potentially vulnerable situations. As Curtis *et al* (2004) remark:

Though interviewing is not intrinsically one of life's riskier activities interviewing more challenging groups is more likely than general interviewing to raise risks.

(Curtis *et al* 2004:171)

Although defining 'more challenging' groups is debatable, undoubtedly the areas where I conducted some of the interviews were high in disadvantage, crime, poverty and social exclusion. On the estate where I interviewed Ben, 19, abandoned burnt-out cars were a familiar sight, there was a high police presence on the day I was there (research diary), and the houses on either side of his were boarded up. The impact of these factors is debatable in social research and although I did not feel unsafe during the interview with Ben, this was the everyday environment for him. Ben explains this further when we are talking about the poor state of his front garden, which he says has been damaged by local youths:

Episode 6

Jane: You haven't got a back garden have you, here?

Ben: No.

Jane: So you can't really use that then, can you?

Ben: No, like I said to the council, I'm not even bothering doing it. I can't sit out in it, partner can't sit out in it, all we use it for is hanging out the washing. I went no, I went sorry, if I can't sit out there and have barbeques in my own home. I went no. I've tried mowing it like I up before Christmas and kids were throwing buckets of cold water.

Jane: I notice the house next door is all boarded up.

Ben: Yeah.

Jane: Is there a reason for that?

Ben: Yeah they got invicted².

² I think Ben means evicted here.

Sampson and Thompson (2003) tackle the issue of researcher safety in the context of their research for women on board a predominantly male dominated ship. They suggest that on many research projects there are 'ambient' and 'situational' risks. Ambient risks include those attached to specific research sites, for example, a ship or where the researcher needs to 'hang out' with gangs on the street. They describe situational risks as those more likely for researcher to become exposed to during the course of the research. They suggest that gender can significantly influence situational risks:

Gender can add to the situational risks in some research contexts and, importantly, the extent to which ambient risks, and particularly those associated with remote research sites can act as an amplifier of situational risk.

(Sampson and Thompson 2003:184)

Sampson and Thomson highlight the importance of communication by the researcher with 'the outside world' (2003:185), and suggest that this should include sensitive discussion prior to the research project being set up. They suggest this discussion should include health and safety issues and using equipment such as mobile phones. Taking these points into consideration, as female researcher I had devised a personal safety strategy, set out in Chapter Three, and also asked within agency contexts not to be referred to young fathers where a lone worker in their team would not go in. Although I have confidence that the teams took account of my concerns, some of the workers in the teams were male and they may not have pondered fully the implications of this for me as a lone female researcher. In future research I will

ensure that this will to be incorporated more explicitly into the gate keeping process, although I am aware that ultimately the decision to conduct or continue with an interview lay with my professional judgement. However the examples provided by the interviews with Keith and Stuart in this chapter serve to illustrate that, whilst I was undertaking narrative interviews with the young men, situational factors particularly with this group of disadvantaged young men also impacted on the research.

4.4. Issues of confidentiality during the interviews

Before starting the research I had considered carefully how I was going to tackle confidentiality and the boundaries of reporting potential child protection issues as mentioned in Chapter Three. However, there were instances, particularly during the interview with Andy, when I felt increasingly uncomfortable with the information he was telling me, despite my having read out the statement regarding confidentiality at the beginning of each interview. Indeed, I became ever more aware that, by adopting a narrative approach interviewing young fathers (and not, say, including their social workers' stories) I had to live with the unease resulting from of the partiality of the information.

4.4.1. The interview with Andy

In the extract below Andy, 21, is talking to me about his fathering of his 9 month old child Sam:

Episode 7

Andy: It's quite hard.

Jane: What being a dad or looking after her?

Andy: All of it. Especially now that she's trying to talk and she's asserting her attitude. It's 'I want this and I don't want that and you will not tell me off for that'.

Jane: How do you think that you will deal with that?

Andy: If she's insistent on going towards an electrical item, she'll get a smacked hand. I don't believe in *smacking* smacking, it's just like a tap on the hand and it's like 'pay attention this is naughty'. To me I know no other way for her to learn what is naughty.

Jane: And is this something that you've talked through with Jane?

Andy: I haven't talked it through big time with her. It's very rare that I have to do it; she's really good about it.

Jane: I mean it's going to get more challenging as she gets older isn't it?

Andy: Yes, but when she can understand what I'm saying it should get easier. But it's the electrical items I really have got a problem with because I can't always see them and she's there and Annie is not always here so, I do do my best, it's rare that I do have to tap her hand.

Jane: I'm sure you do.

Andy: I mean I've tapped it like two or three times a month. I have sometimes when I'm near there by the computer and I see that she's up trying to push the button on the telly or she's over by an electrical item I say, 'no, don't do it, behave' and she'll fall down onto the floor and go fetch a toy. I know you're not supposed to smack them and I don't *smack* smack.

During the interview with Andy I felt uneasy that we were moving towards difficult ethical territory which may have been encouraged by the narrative technique of the interview. Although I did not feel it appropriate at the time to act on my statement about confidentiality (read out at the beginning of each interview) of involving others in what he had told me, it is apparent that the situation has similar components to those identified in Figure 6. Specifically, there were role tensions for me between my role as a researcher, wanting access to the young man's story, as a former social worker with concerns for the protection of his child, and also my responsibility to the gatekeepers who arranged access for me. This dilemma is not unique in social work research and is an example of the ways in which 'issues around confidentiality, negotiation and professional competence are interwoven and complex' (Nutt 2002:79). Indeed this is a point applicable to social research with children and young people generally, that they could unexpectedly reveal information which needs to be passed onto a third party. The consequences of not having a statement indicating that you may have to pass on certain information could be far-reaching.

It can be interpreted that Andy is setting out his position and identity as a father on smacking during the co-construction with me. Although, at the time of the interview, smacking was not illegal in the UK, I was aware from information provided by his social worker that Sophia, his daughter, was on the child protection register for concerns of neglect but not issues arising from physical chastisement. Moreover, on a personal level I found the idea of any kind of smacking of such a small child personally abhorrent. Andy introduces smacking as a subject by mentioning the 'tap on the hand' but then clarifies this by maintaining he does not '*smack* smack'. He is

trying to differentiate a tap on the hand, which he says he engages in, from wider negative connotations of smacking as abuse. This is reaffirmed at the end of the section when he maintains, 'I know you're not supposed to smack them and I don't smack, smack'. Andy is contextualising his position that smacking is wrong and that he does not engage in this behaviour or '*smacking* smacking'. In the episode he tries to distance what he is doing from child abuse. However, my immediate reaction to the mention of smacking is to revert to a professional social work mode, by my retort, 'and is this something that you've talked through with Jane?' Jane is his social worker and I am interested in reassuring myself that his actions towards his daughter have been tackled professionally and that social services know about his views and actions. My position is arguably influenced by the discourses I have been exposed to during my personal and professional life such as child protection (Otway 1996) and trying to be a good parent myself. As a narrative researcher I could have replied 'tell me more about this', however, my anxiety as a former social worker transcends any other persona at that time and I want to reassure myself of the safety of the child.

Another way of looking at the above episode is that it also illustrates my desire to be a 'good researcher', by trying to continue to establish rapport with Andy even when in difficult territory. This can be seen by my reassurance regarding his description of him 'tapping' his daughter's hand with me replying that 'I'm sure you do' to his 'I do do my best'. In a sense I am colluding with him in supporting the view that he is doing his best in difficult circumstances when Annie, the mother, is not there.

Research associated with encouraging participants to disclose private thoughts often encounters the problem of needing to achieve greater rapport and 'friendship' with the

interview subject than more quantitative research. However, this rapport needs to be managed. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest, rapport requires the ingredients of warmth, a caring demeanour and the ability to promote trust. Duncombe and Jessop (2002) also add that naivety is often used as a strategy by some researchers and that there are elements of 'inauthentic' and 'phoney' behaviour exercised by researchers, even researchers who are acutely aware of power dynamics in interviews. They remark that research that addresses emotions often requires empathy and this can bring 'greater ethical problems' for the researcher which has to be dealt with (2002:108). Although I was aware of needing to establish rapport with all of the young men, I was fairly clear in my mind that I was not there to be their friend, rather someone to listen to their stories, although as the episode with Stuart illustrates boundaries can easily be crossed. Engaging in phoney friendships and acting in a naive manner with participants, however, can be fraught with difficulties as it can encourage the participant down a road of self-disclosure for which they are not prepared, perhaps revealing events that cause emotional pain. There is a danger that disclosure can then lead to the interview becoming quasi-therapeutic, for example, the storied therapy advocated by White and Epston (1990).

Jones (1998) remarks that there is often a fine line in interview situations between the researcher's urge to find out and the participants need to tell:

there are other reasons for agreeing to be interviewed. There is loneliness. I would certainly say that some people that I have interviewed have agreed to be interviewed because they are lonely and rather like the thought of being visited for an afternoon.

(Jones 1998:50)

I would argue being a researcher and negotiating the complexities of narrative interviews with vulnerable young people, requires a keen self-awareness of biographical and personal influences, a flexibility of approach and an ongoing alertness to the dynamics in the interview. It also requires an understanding that when using a narrative method with vulnerable young people, whilst a great deal of rich and potentially valuable data maybe generated, researchers need to be prepared to acknowledge, and be ready to deal with, the uncomfortable boundaries of this data.

4.4.2. Vulnerability

Jones (1998) in the quotation above refers to the isolation and loneliness of some participants in social research. These appeared to be factors which occurred with Adam, 16, who was in police custody when I interviewed him. On reflection his loneliness and isolation was a source of vulnerability for him, perhaps encouraging him to agree to the interview in the first place. I had initially written to Adam with the aim of interviewing him whilst he was on remand in prison and he had readily agreed. At that stage I reflected upon the boundaries of consent regarding being interviewed while in custody and considered that his consent to participate in the research may have been motivated, in part, by a wish to relieve the boredom of prison and to be visited. However, prior to this interview taking place, the social worker 'phoned to tell me that Adam had been brought to court unexpectedly, potentially saving me a journey to the prison. I therefore decided to interview Adam later that day, in a police cell, whilst he was waiting to appear in juvenile court. This initially seemed a

reasonable course of action to take; professionals often talk to offenders in police custody, indeed his probation officer saw him after me.

However, as I was to find out, the dynamics of research interviewing in a cell were thorny, and the power dynamics difficult. I was free to leave the cell when I wanted and the custody sergeant had previously informed me that all I had to do was call or bang on the door and he would come immediately to let me out. Obviously this was not the case for Adam and it was demonstrated when he asked to go to the toilet and was told to 'wait'. Adam had been charged with taking and driving many stolen cars and in addition was the son of a police officer. This information was being referred to quite openly amongst the staff in the cells as I waited to interview him. The environment felt oppressive and discriminatory. On reflection it was not the best context to encourage someone to 'tell their story' about becoming a father. However, Adam's child had been born the day before and he had not seen her, so it could be argued that my interview was offering him the first real opportunity to talk about his baby, in an environment where no one else was really interested. He was upset at his current circumstance, especially in relation to not having seen his daughter, and later that afternoon he was sent to prison for 18 months. I also reflected that, although the police cell was not ideal, had I interviewed Adam in prison he still would have been incarcerated and the power dynamics would have been similar. It was clear from our verbal and non-verbal communication that both Adam and I felt intimidated by the environment of the police cell; we were both hunched, sitting in the corner of the police cell and talking quietly. Moreover, during the interview I was increasingly aware of his vulnerability. In the episode below I apologise for upsetting him by

talking about his past offences, giving him the option to stop and checking that he still wished to continue with the interview:

Episode 8

Adam: I nearly lost him his job; he had to chase me at high speed to [.....](eyes well up with tears)

Jane: So you must be a bit upset about that.

Adam: Yeah I can't really talk about it, actually I try not to think about it because it makes me upset.

Jane: OK, sorry [.....]stop

Adam: No. no it's all right, it's not heavy. I don't mind talking to you if it's going to help with your research or whatever.

Adam thanked *me* when I left the cell, for helping him fill the time whilst waiting for his sentence and he explained that he also wanted to share his experiences to help prevent other fathers from being in his circumstances.

4.5. Summary of chapter

The aim of this chapter has been to reflect on the process of narrative research with young fathers and it has also highlighted how difficult interviewing vulnerable young fathers can be and has explored some of the difficulties associated with using narrative interviews. Some of the analysis has focussed on particular tensions involved in the narrative approach, particularly the complications which can result in

encouraging young men to tell their stories in their own way. On the one hand, as some of the data in this chapter has illustrated, some of the young men were reluctant to talk which resulted in (sometimes inappropriate) overcompensation in the interview by me. Prohibitive factors in generating stories seemed to be focussed on their reluctance to talk and narrate their experiences and factors associated with my status and biography has been explored. The evidence from this study suggests that each young man was different, and how he responded largely depended on a variety of factors, for example his age, circumstance, whether the context of the interview was right for him, how he saw me and how I reacted to him.

On the other hand, some of the examples used in this chapter indicated that some participants were able and willing to 'story' their experiences. However, this produced other anxieties, namely that the young man would disclose information which would need the intervention of a third party. Not all of the issues which arose from the interviews could have been foreseen prior to the research being conducted, for example, how I reacted to and felt about some of the conditions the young fathers and their families were living in, or the upsetting events they portrayed. In addition, although I had read out a statement of confidentiality at the beginning of the interview, by encouraging a participant to tell their stories in their own way there was an inherent tension regarding the uncomfortable reality that they may want to talk about issues or events which made me feel awkward.

Nonetheless, having contextualised and discussed some of the difficult issues which the process of the research raised, Chapters Five and Six will explore the rich data generated from this previously under-researched group.

CHAPTER FIVE

STORIES OF THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD

5.0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of the narratives produced by some of the young fathers interviewed in this study, through discrete episodes or stories from their overall interviews. Of specific interest is how they position themselves (Harre & Van Langenhove 1999) during the transition to young fatherhood and the strategies and relationships they describe using to do this. Chapter Two made the point that young fathers are on the cusp of a series of changes. Firstly, they are making the transition to fatherhood and secondly, they are young men moving from adolescence, to adulthood. All of the young men in this study had recently found themselves in new contexts, situations and relationships brought about by their partner's pregnancy and birth of their child. Of significance, however, through the analysis of the data is that a group of young men told their stories in strikingly similar ways.

All of the young men in this study describe the fragmentation and largely negative experiences which have taken place in their lives and these factors are represented in both this chapter and Chapter Six. Due to these experiences it could be speculated that they should give examples of Gergen's (1994) regressive pattern of storytelling, whereby individuals frame their lives negatively. Indeed, at times, all the young men in the study do refer to engaging in risky, reckless and selfish behaviour associated with some experiences of adolescence (Coleman and Hendry 2004; Dennison and

Coleman 2003) and also describe the challenges of young fatherhood. However, what is significant about the young men specifically referred to in this chapter is that their overall narratives are essentially 'progressive' (Gergen 1994) and depict an optimistic overall pattern to their lives so far, which they attribute to meeting their partner, the birth of their child and the generally improving relationships which have followed this event. Young fatherhood is not presented negatively by the young men discussed in this chapter, rather it is situated as part of a trail of events which are depicted as changing their lives for the better. The focus of this chapter is to concentrate on the stories of these young men and the episodes in the chapter refer to; Luke (15), Peter (24), Andy (21), Daniel (18), Dwayne (17), John (17), Keith (19), Jay P(19), Victor (16), Manuel (22).

Other young men in this study told their stories of the transition to fatherhood differently and their contributions will feature in the chapter that follows, which focuses more specifically on stories of family life rather than on the transition to young fatherhood. For example, Paul and Mark use more negative descriptions when talking about their relationships with their partners and their stories are situated in Chapter Six (6.4.3), where their descriptions of the complex nature of their partnerships are analysed as part of the role they describe playing in fatherhood. In addition Shaun and Ben, although talking about their partners, do not do so in the same depth and in the same ways as the young men described in this chapter, whilst Adam tends to concentrate on the (negative) importance of his father (6.2.3) rather than his partner. As previously explained Stuart's interview has not been included in the data due to problems with the tape.

This chapter has five sections. The first section focuses on how a group of young men frame some of their adolescent experiences, particularly in relation to stories of recklessness and risk. The second section moves on to analyse how they positively position their current partner and her pregnancy and/or birth of their child as rescuing them from their previous anti-social behaviour. Thirdly, the young men describe how they now feel more responsible following becoming a father. The fourth section details the tensions some of these young men portray in trying to fashion their identities both as fathers and young men. Finally there is a summary of the main points of this chapter.

5.1. From recklessness, to rescue and responsibility.

5.1.1. Stories of recklessness: fighting

‘I’ve been to court probably more times than the judges have’ (Luke age 15)

Many young men in this study, prior to the pregnancy or birth, said they had been involved in youth offending including breaching the peace, causing actual bodily harm (ABH) grievous bodily harm (GBH), burglary, car theft and taking without consent. All of the young men described in this chapter detailed their involvement in these types of risk-taking behaviour. Coleman and Hendry (2004) suggest that the concept of risk-taking in adolescence is ‘ill defined’ (2004:1221) yet can focus around ‘thrill seeking’ ‘controlled risk-taking’ and ‘irresponsibility’ (2004:121). In the first, thrill seeking, young people often mis-judge the extent of the risks they are taking; in the second, controlled risk-taking, they perform to establish a ‘social position’ within

groups and the third, irresponsibility, relates to risks taken in spite of the jeopardy they imply. It is hard to distinguish specific risk-taking rationales from the stories in this study, with most seeming to be a complex mixture of described motivations. Connell (1995) argues that part of risk-taking, particularly being aggressive, 'tough' and 'hard' appear components of an image of contemporary hegemonic masculinity and fighting, aggression and toughness materialize in some of the stories of the young men in this chapter. Although the interviews did not include a specific question about fighting it often emerged as a by product of telling stories on other issues and seemed to fulfil different functions for the young men. In the extract below Luke, 15, describes his offences and outlines how aggression has been a feature in his life so far:

Episode 1

Luke: I'm on an order because I done some burglaries and loads of assaults, GBH's and ABH's.

Jane: Right, OK, on who?

Luke: People.

Jane: What, just walking up and down the street?

Luke: No, right well they think that I just go around hitting people, but if someone comes up to me I just hit them back. I don't see how they can get me done because most of who I hit is men, they must be poofs or something.

[.....]

Jane: Right, OK, so tell me how you go about getting, you know how you go about hitting someone, what you are doing when you walk down the street.

Luke: I walk down the street and someone looks at me funny I ask them what they are looking at and if they say 'nothing' I just do nothing, but if they say 'look' at you or stuff, being cocky and all that, I just hit them.

In this episode Luke describes how he uses violence as part of his identity as a young man. Violence is his response to any real or imagined threat to his masculine agency. It is a threat which is difficult to define but is associated with a 'look' and a 'cocky' attitude from others, which crosses a boundary for him. Luke's reasoning is that, where violence and aggression are concerned, there is a clear masculine hierarchy and if other young men cannot take being hit, they are associated by Luke with feminised versions of masculinity. They are 'othered' by Luke as not being real men by being called 'poofs'. As Wetherell and Edley (1999) explain 'othering' is:

a way of being masculine which marginalises and subordinates not only women but also alternative forms of masculinity such as 'camp' or effeminate masculinity. Typically it also involves the brutal repression of the activities of gay men and their construction as a despised other.

(Wetherell and Edley 1999:336)

Luke does not associate himself with this 'lesser' type of masculinity as his identity focuses on being the one who does the hitting and he uses violence as a resource to assert his type of masculinity. As Mac An Ghail (1994) states:

Contemporary modes of masculinity are highly complex and contradictory, displaying power, violence, competition a sense of identity and social support.

(Mac An Ghail 1994:51)

Luke, talking in the present tense, describes how defending himself is important but not in a 'heroic' sense, for example, by putting himself in the role of a saviour or rescuer, rather it is framed in terms of his perpetuation of a macho image. It can be seen in later episodes from Luke's interview that there are contradictions for him with this version of masculinity, when he tries to distance himself from this reckless and aggressive identity and associate himself with greater responsibility. Another young man, Victor, 16, indicates how he has also used violence in the past and that this type of behaviour has taken him through the magistrate's court and into contact with the youth offending team (YOT):

Episode 2

Victor: I come here because I had a fight, I beat a boy up.

Jane: You did?

Victor: Yeah.

Jane: What at school?

Victor: No, it was outside my house, I told, I asked him for a fag and he told me to 'F' off and it all ended up me hitting him because I thought he was going to hit me, but I hit him too hard and knocked out all his teeth and that [.....] and then in court I found out he was only 13, I was 15 at the time and they put me here. They was going to put me on Schedule One list, which is with all murderers, rapists and perverts and everything, because Michael he was that bad because he was young, he was many years younger.

Jane: So how do you feel about that? How do you feel about...

Victor: I feel really sorry for him but I said in court and everything that I would take whatever is coming to me. Didn't mean to hit him, just thought when I hit him and that.

Jane: Do you get into lots of fights?

Victor: No, I give up fights...I don't think I've gone up to 20 in my life, 25, a lot of people who have. I don't think I've gone over 15. I hardly ever fight. I know I can fight and I can protect myself but like I don't believe in fighting, so many people don't like it.

Victor describes lashing out violently and knocking out the teeth of a 13 year old. Similar to Luke, being able to protect himself and talking about how he does this is an important part of Victor's masculinity. However, this extract indicates a change in Victor's attitude by introducing an element of remorse for his past behaviour and beginning to distance himself from fighting. This is repeated by Luke later on in his narrative, although they give different reasons for starting to distance themselves from these violent outbursts, with Luke attributing it to his girlfriend whilst Victor explains that 'so many' people do not like this behaviour. They are both describing a movement in position due to the influence of others.

5.1.2. Offending

Three of the young men considered in this chapter described having been in youth offending institutions and several were currently involved with youth offending teams. For example, at the time of his interview Keith had recently been 'tagged'

following his release from prison. The tag, a device fitted to his wrist, alerts the police if he does not keep to a specific curfew. In the episode below Keith describes the influence of his older brother on his criminal career. At the time of the interview his brother was a heroin addict and is described by Keith, 19, as using burglary to finance his drug habit.

Episode 3

Jane: So tell me how you decide to go and commit an offence, what kinds of things do you do? Who suggests it?

Keith: My brother.

Jane: OK, so what kind of things does he say?

Keith: Anything, he just says 'do you want to come and do this with me' and my silly brain I say 'yeah'.

Keith situates himself passively in the crimes, relating being led by his brother, whereas Dwayne, 17, in Episode 4, describes how his previous involvement in criminal activities was not to appease others or maintain a social position, but to express his anger:

Episode 4

Dwayne: When my Nan died, that's when I was offending really badly, I used to get drunk and everything, nicking, stealing cars

Jane: And do you think that was because of, why was that because of the alcohol or because you felt upset or

Dwayne: Both really. I was really mad about my Nan dying and that. Think, I didn't even go to her funeral coz I was too upset and that I suppose. Beating up people and that, that's what I was doing when my Nan died, mainly beating people up, but that was taking all the anger out that I had inside of me. That's why I had to do Anger Management and all that.

Dwayne reinforces a link between alcohol and offending and describes using violence in a cathartic way, to relieve the pent-up anger he felt. This episode also highlights my role as a researcher. Dwayne did not present himself during the interview as a fluent storyteller and I start to provide him with a reason or 'answer' for his behaviour at the beginning of the episode. I appear worried that he may not be able to come up with any reasons of his own for his described behaviour, perhaps indicating my own view of adolescence. However, Dwayne delivers an unaided reason of his own, explaining how he felt when his grandmother died, a totally unexpected response as far as I was concerned. In retrospect this was a significant moment in the study and enabled me to reflect that my interventions, especially by providing them with answers, may have prevented individuals from delivering their own meaning and interpretation. This marks a crucial part in my development as a researcher and has led me to reflect on the differences between facilitating a participant to talk and leading them, due to the pressure of needing the data.

Daniel, 18, is another of the young men for whom offending, fighting and alcohol were connected and part of previous reckless behaviour. Moreover, Episode 5 is

another example of how the knowledge produced in the interview is a result of the co-construction between me a middle class, female researcher with her own biographical influences and a young, working-class father. As Figure 6 in Chapter Four sets out, life experiences and expectations colour the schema researchers bring to an interview.

Episode 5

Jane: Have you ever been in trouble with the police?

Daniel: Yeah.

Jane: How's that come about?

Daniel: Just drunk and disorderly, getting mouthy, just getting out of line.

Jane: When did it start?

Daniel: When I was 14.

Jane: What did you do?

Daniel; What did I do when I was 14; fighting when I was drunk up the town, basically most of it is just drunk and disorderly and fighting.

Jane: Right so you were 14, so my son's 15 and he doesn't get drunk and disorderly and go up and down drinking on the high street, so why were you at 14 drinking?

Daniel: I don't know, I was just easily led on really. I was out with older people that was like 16 at the time, 17, 18. I was just out with them, they was having a few drinks, so I thought I'd be clever and have a few but it just got out of control.

My part in this episode (one of the earlier interviews) shows my expectations about teenage behaviour and my moral stance. This places Daniel in a difficult position of having to defend his previous actions and behaviour as an offender. My moralistic position in this interview is clear and probably produced the response from Daniel that he was led on by others, trying to associate with them and to appear as 'clever' as them. This concurs with one of Coleman and Hendry's (2004) reasons for young people participating in risky behaviours, namely to establish a social position within a group. However, this deduction has come about as part of a specific co-construction between me, arguably more powerful in the interaction, and a young person who has engaged in anti-social behaviour. In altered circumstances with a different response from me or a different interviewer Daniel may have told another story. This episode further highlights the significance of reflexivity in the research process and the importance of transparency, as it would have been easy to have excluded the last section of this excerpt, or to have taken the episode out altogether.

Throughout the research process I felt keenly that many of the young men I interviewed were the same age as my own son and this provoked many differing emotions and reactions in me as a researcher. In some interviews I felt relieved that my own son was not in similar circumstances to a particular young man, in others, for example in the interview with Victor, 16, I wanted to take him home and make him part of my own family (as I often felt whilst a practising social worker). With Daniel I am now aware that I stepped out of the role of a researcher and into that of a slightly irritated and frustrated adult, not a stance conducive to narrative interviewing.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) comment that directive interviewing, although a risky strategy, can be effective if used sparingly with some participants, particularly if

trying to 'penetrate fronts'(1995:155) and push individual boundaries. Although this was not a direct aim in this study there are occasions where I do use this strategy with some of the participants, as often I am trying to understand the reasons behind the way they position themselves in a particular way. On reflection this is not a technique that all young people would respond to and should be used cautiously.

5.1.3. Drink, drugs and unruliness

During the course of the interviews some of the ten young men described how fractured, hurt and complex their early teenage years were. John, 17, was one of these young men and portrayed spending periods of time in both residential and foster care as well as describing experiencing past abuse from his father. In the extract below he narrates how he became involved with alcohol and drugs:

Episode 6

John: I was with a girl before that for a year, that was when I was a proper alkie, about aged 13, 14

Jane: So when you say you were an 'alkie' how many did you used to drink?

[.....10seconds]

John: It started off like just like two a night and then it gradually built up, at the end of the year I was drinking like eight cans a night.

Jane: Of what?

John: Stella and sometimes Super Tennants, Super Skull, White Lightning.

This extract illustrates a point made by many of the young men, that alcohol was a resource which was used early on in the teenage years, and the use escalated. Harnett *et al* (2000) argue that alcohol use is part of the transition to adulthood for some teenage boys. Coleman and Hendry (2004) remark that 'alcohol consumption amongst teenagers is common' (2004:124), although they point out that there are different motivations for using it: to relax, increase their ability to socialise or escape (Hendry 1998). Harnett *et al* (2000) argue that the meaning young men attribute to their drinking differs within situations and with biographical changes. Most of the young men in Harnett *et al*'s (2000) study engaged in experimental drinking particularly during the secondary school years and a few engaged in more therapeutic drinking where they 'drank to forget'. It is unclear in Episode 6 if John was drinking on his own; however, he states that alcohol became central to his life. The language John uses in relation to alcohol is also significant. I ask what he was drinking in order to see if he was drinking strong spirits and expecting to be told, cider, beer, vodka etc. Instead John is specific as to the brands, which surprised me.

In a later episode in his interview, John explains how he first became involved with drugs:

Episode 7

John: I started getting into drugs was when I was first there.

Jane: How old were you?

John: Fourteen. I'd had a bit when I was eleven and smoked when I was eleven because like my older brothers were at it out there, but that was like when I got

proper hooked on it. It was only like a couple of puffs and I was floating and I was like 'oh this is good' and I stole his (foster parent's) car with a boy in foster care there. The boy got taken out of foster care there and they still had me and then one day my mum decided to phone up and I moved back in with her. Really I should have stayed there with them. It was better for me because I dropped out of school and everything.

John portrays episodes in his life which define his early teenage years. His brothers are positioned as dominant characters in his story and are presented as contributing to his slide into drug use. John links the use of drug with crime, stealing cars, a theme also echoed by Peter, 24, who makes the direct link between stealing cars and raising the money to buy drugs. He recounts how, as young teenagers, he and his friends used to be involved in boxing (a more legitimate activity) and how gradually their involvement in criminal activities escalated:

Episode 8

Peter: Erm [.....] to the point where it was smoking drugs, and taking cars and things like that. Things we shouldn't have been doing, but at the end of the day we were young and learning I suppose.

Jane: How old were you when you started doing all of that?

Peter: Just over 12. about 12 and three quarters just before I was 13.

Jane: Why? Why did you start?

Peter: Boredom I think. Probably the best answer I can give. Because where I grew up there wasn't much to do, any social clubs, where there was you would go there and they would be smoking drugs anyway.

In the episode below I ask Peter if the drugs and car thefts were related:

Peter: Yes you could say they was related. But first the cars were just taking them for a bit of fun.

Jane: Why?

Peter: Because there were plenty of fields around where we was. We used to take them in the woods and smash them up and things. Then as I got older we started realising that we needed money to buy the drugs and there was money in taking the cars, so I put that away.

Jane: What did you feel when you were nicking peoples' cars? Did you think about the consequences or..?

Peter: Nothing. I didn't worry about it at all, not until after I gave it up. And once that started happening then I realised the things I had done.

Peter reiterates the theme that the very early teens are a vulnerable time for some for becoming involved in drink, drugs and drug-related crime and makes a connection between being young and learning, making the point that it is acceptable to experiment when you are young. However, as MacDonald and Marsh (2005) point out there is a relationship between drug and criminal careers, which can escalate.

Manuel, like Peter, however, describes a link between being 'young and stupid'.

Frosh *et al* (2002) point out that for some young men adolescence is a time of

'hedonistic self indulgence and lack of control' (2002:30) a discourse also identified by Raby (2003) who argues that this is often perpetuated by adults. Connell (2000) refers to this phase in a young man's life as the 'classic wild oats sowing script' (2000:98) and Coleman and Hendry (2004) argue that this type of activity is engaged in, to look 'cool or grown up' (2004:128). Connell, however, states that this type of risky behaviour is undertaken 'in order to be masculine' (2000:185):

When a group of young men in a car drink, drive and crash they are not being driven to it by uncontrollable hormones, or even an uncontrollable male role. They are acting that way in order to be masculine. The dangerous driving is a resource from their making of masculinity. Here the active construction of masculinity is a key to the risk-taking behaviour and to strategies of prevention.

(Connell 2000:185)

Connell explains that the peer group 'sustains' a version of masculinity at a particular point in a young man's life and this group membership offers a validation of masculine status. Some young fathers in this study explain that the circumstances of the pregnancy and birth of their child changed their perspective towards their peer group and it no longer held the same importance. Consequently, behaviour and identities are described as being re-fashioned.

Both Peter and Manuel explain that they did not think of the consequences of their reckless actions until they were older and had given up their involvement in drugs and car theft. Manuel remarks: 'Beforehand, I just wouldn't take any notice. I would get up and do it. I wouldn't have thought about the dangers involved in it.' This

realisation of consequences is a strong theme which surfaces in relation to the move in position described by all these ten young men, specifically towards accepting and identifying with the responsibility which comes with fatherhood (Section 5.3).

Victor, 16, describes graphically the central position of drugs in his life prior to the pregnancy of his girlfriend. He initially presents his involvement with drugs as being an activity undertaken with his friends (Episode 9) but in Episode 10 he describes how drug use is embedded within his family:

Episode 9

Victor: I used to smoke the bomb.

Jane: You used to smoke?

Victor: The bomb.

Jane: What's that?

Victor: The bomb. I don't know you just put puff in it with a fag.

Jane: What, like a great big pipe or something?

Victor: Yeah, it's like a pipe and sometimes we get one with a bottle or something so everyone gets drunk, but not often. Before I was heavy on puff I used to hang around with, I don't know you might have heard of them, B*** (name) and all Kim and that lot and they was really, they used to go and do alcohol all the time and I started drinking quite a lot. Then I got done with the police and that, stopped hanging around with them. I got done getting drunk and trying to walk off with a crate from out of the Co-op.**

In these episodes Victor initially tries to distance himself from knowledge about what the 'bomb' is, picking up on my ignorance or perhaps fearing my potential disapproval as an adult. He links the drug use with alcohol and a peer group with whom he used to drink and the drinking is strongly linked with stealing. In an effort to explain the reason behind this previous behaviour, Victor reflects on his childhood, and describes the culture of drugs in which he lived with his family; a culture which he describes as killing his father from a heroin overdose and putting his mother in prison for heroin related activities. These two episodes emphasise the past disadvantage in Victor's life:

Episode 10

Jane: So where did you used to do this?

Victor: I used to do this in my sister's house, but I never used to smoke it at all. My mum was smoking it all her life and I think that's why I ain't been bothered about 'oh, puff'. It's really bad because of the way I've been brought up around it, like a lot of my family have smoked it but-

Jane: Something you said to me because you got quite heavily, quite a lot of influence in your family for drugs and stuff like that, that's gone on in your family. What do you think that's going to make you not be like that?

Victor: Because I've seen them go through it all, like heroin. I would never touch anything like that, because all the way I've seen my mum go through when she used to collapse on it and that. All the people that she, obviously I've seen more than my mum, I've seen all the people I don't know that used to be around her.

She sold it and she went to prison. I've seen a lot of people coming to get it and how they were, it was horrible especially seeing my mum on it.

Victor seems ambivalent about admitting the extent of his involvement in the drugs culture, especially where he states that the drug use took place in his sister's house, but that he did not participate. This is a direct contrast to Episode 9 where he tells of his involvement with the 'bomb' and alcohol with a group of friends. Significantly Victor, like Peter in Episode 8, is talking about his involvement with drugs in the past tense, trying to disengage and distance himself from this previous identity. He seems to be 'othering' and differentiating himself from his mother's life style and presenting himself, in Episodes 8 and 9, as drawing on his inner resources and resilience in this distancing process. I ask Victor what was horrible about his mother's drug use:

Episode 11

Victor: The way she was, the way she lost all of her weight felt like she lost touch with her family, like she hardly spoke to any of them and then us. It felt like she was just drifting away from us. So, like she weren't caring anymore, but she was deep down, but just dealing with it, go with it. I think that I've got quite a strong mind like getting over it.

Jane: You sound like you have.

At 16 Victor is struggling to make sense of his fragmented and drug-influenced childhood at the same time as becoming a father. He acknowledges his mother's lack of care for him and his siblings but refuses to position her as totally uncaring, by

saying that she did care 'deep down'. In the last line of Episode 11, I again move out of the role of a social researcher and, from a human perspective, seek to reassure him that he is doing well trying to cope with the past emotional upset in his life.

5.2. Rescue: swapping a criminal career for a family one

The episodes in the previous section set out the past involvement some young men describe having with reckless behaviour. The definition of 'past', however, varies with each young man. For example, for Luke and Victor the past is talked about in terms of weeks and months and for others, Manuel and Peter, in terms of months and years. Recklessness during adolescence is not a new theme in social research.

Indeed, as Chapter One pointed out, involvement in deviant behaviour is often described as a feature of working-class youth. However, what has emerged from this research as a significant finding is that for some young men who become fathers there are two further, more optimistic, phases in their lives to which the pregnancy, birth of the child and subsequent social relationships contribute. Specifically, the overall narratives of the young men in this section demonstrate how many position their partners, or the birth of their child, as effecting a distinct change in their identities.

This is consistent with other social research where desistance from criminal behaviour has been associated with becoming a father (Laub and Sampson 2003; MacDonald and Marsh 2005; Webster *et al* 2006) Some of the young men in this study frame their current partners as being pivotal in this process by describing them as rescuing them from their previous anti-social and reckless behaviour. Others describe the birth of the child as being equally significant. As Chapter Two suggested, positioning theory

describes the way individuals are situated within a lived narrative (Harre and Van Langenhove 1999). The authors argue:

It can easily be seen that the social force of an action and the position of the actor and interactors mutually determine one another. Conversations have storylines and the positions people take in a conversation will be linked to these storylines.

(Harre and Van Langenhove 1999:17)

To apply Harre and Van Langenhove's point, the young men in this section describe the relationship with their current partner, or the birth of their child or children, as the 'social force of the action' to redefine their identities. In the extracts below it can be seen that not all of the young men have reached the same stage in this process. Indeed for some, like Luke and Victor, their babies have not yet been born, however, their stories indicate that they are pre-positioning themselves ahead of the event and situating their partner as the agent of change. The first section below explores how their current partners are situated and the second (5.2.2.) looks at how others frame the child.

5.2.1. Mothers through the eyes of the fathers

She just seemed to be the ideal woman to me. (Manuel age 22)

In the following episodes the young men identify features which are described as contributing to them being rescued from their previous reckless and anti-social identities. Firstly, some participants present their partner as being 'different' from

other young women they have had relationships with. Secondly, and connected to this, is how their current partner is described as saving them from their previous reckless behaviour. Thirdly, some young men present themselves as sacrificing this previous anti-social behaviour for their partner and/or baby.

It is also possible to identify differing motivations in the young men's stories for this change in behaviour. Some describe wanting to change because of the investment they have in the relationship with the mother. Others hint at the potential for a different, more positive, life.

In the extract below Luke, 15, describes the sacrifice he has made in keeping out of trouble ('that' in line one) for several months, since he has been with his current girlfriend who is pregnant with his baby. He also explains that she is 'different' from previous girlfriends, primarily due to her background:

Episode 12

Luke: I don't do that, I ain't done that in like seven months now because I've been with my girlfriend for ages and I ain't done that with her. Like I ain't done nothing wrong when I was with her, I kept out of trouble for like seven months.

Jane: Have you had lots of other girlfriends?

Luke: Yeah she's proper different.

Jane: What's different about her?

Luke: Because she's like come from sort of like posh, not posh but like a posh family, you know like a perfect family and all that.

Jane: What's a perfect family?

Luke: Don't do nothing wrong, who thinks crime is bad and all like stuff like that and she's like doing good at school and she's in like the higher sets, everyone thinks she's a boffin and all that.

He continues:

Luke: I was doing- I was literally getting nicked every day or every two days and all that. I just wanted to stop because I was with her and she didn't like it.

Jane: What did she say to you?

Luke: Like she said she didn't want me to do it no more and all that, so I didn't.

Jane: Just a minute ago you said you don't like people telling you what to do.

Luke: Yeah I know but I love her and all that.

This extract presents a contrast between Luke's generally negative description of his previous experience of family and school life (being placed into care by his mother and of being permanently excluded from school) with the perception he gives of his girlfriend's family. Luke supports the idea that there is a 'perfect' family, which his girlfriend apparently has. In his overall narrative Luke presents himself as having been out side of this 'ideal' family and describes a different transition experience. His partner is presented as being from a different social class to him and presumably, prior to meeting Luke, having a different transition experience from him. She is now living with Luke and his father, is pregnant and is being 'fast tracked' into adulthood by her status as a young parent to be (Jones 2003). Her circumstances are described by Luke

as changing and Luke describes being influenced by her and her 'ideal' family and trying to alter his previous delinquent identity.

I can be seen to be challenging the two contradictory presented aspects of Luke's identity, where I remind him that he had been excluded from school because he 'did not like being told what to do'. However, he describes changing his behaviour for his girlfriend because she apparently told him she 'didn't like it'. Luke presents his love for his girlfriend as the justification for the change. In Episode 13 he describes how he has changed his behaviour in an effort to integrate himself with her posh, 'ideal' family and present himself as being acceptable to her parents:

Episode 13

Jane: Do you speak to her mum?

Luke: I like, no because her mum and dad don't like me.

Jane: Why is that?

Luke: Because of my past. I'm a criminal and all that.

Jane: Right so you don't actually see them?

Luke: I go round there when she wants me to, because they drop..I try to make an effort with them and they try to make an effort with me.

Jane: What kind of effort? What, do they get their best dining table out or best cutlery or something?

Luke: No, I mean like try to speak to me like that. I don't say swearing and all that.

Jane: And how's that going?

Luke: It all right, it's all right.

In the above extract it is clear there are tensions for Luke. He describes making an effort to distance himself from his previous identity and adopt a new one. This new identity includes not committing offences, giving up fighting, not swearing and, apparently, being polite to her parents. Later on he explains that he now stays in every night with his girlfriend, except the night that he goes boxing. In the episode above I ask about the kind of effort her parents are making with him. Although said in a manner attempting to be humorous I am now aware that this comment may have been inappropriate. However, the motive behind my question was to find out the nature of the effort his partner's parents were making with him. The place of humour in interviews with vulnerable participants is difficult and has led me to construe that it should be used sparingly, as it can often replicate dominant and subordinate power relationships and may make participants feel uncomfortable. However, in more recent research with black young fathers in the US, I noticed that many of the participants used humour as a strategy with me, encouraging me to laugh and to exaggerate certain points they were making when narrating their stories.

Staying in and distancing themselves from their previous lives and contacts is a theme echoed by other young men. Daniel, 18, and Dwayne, 17, (in episodes 14 and 15), like Luke, emphasise how 'different' their current partners are and how these young women have changed them:

Episode 14

Daniel: She was just quiet and she bought me down a peg or two.

Jane: How do you mean?

Daniel: Well, up until then I was always getting into trouble but since I met her I ain't got into trouble.

I ask Dwayne what is different about his partner:

Episode 15

Dwayne: I don't know, most of the other girls I used to go out with and that, they used to be 'little divs' and that, but she's calmed me down a lot and that.

Jane: What do you men by 'little divs'? What does that mean?

Dwayne: Don't know. They always like to cause arguments with boys and that who walked past with like me and my mates and that, always used to frighten them. But like since I've been with my girlfriend now, she's kept me out of trouble, well for a little while to be honest.

Jane: How does she do that?

Dwayne: Don't know, I just stay in, I don't go out anymore. I just stay in with her most of the time.

Dwayne was one of the young men who were more reluctant to tell their story. In being asked to expand on answers, Dwayne's defence mechanism was often to answer that he 'didn't know', implying that he had not thought about a particular issue or did not have an opinion. However, when he does reply his descriptions are concise but

sandwiched between many statements of 'I don't know'. In Episode 14 it can be seen that Dwayne talks, like Luke, in terms of what his partner has done for him. Andy, 21, also describes how he 'had quite a few ladies, some of whom I don't even remember, bit of a jack the lad in my day. I consider myself to be an ex- alcoholic so some of the girls I don't remember'. He then goes on to describe how he first saw his partner,

Annie:

Episode 16

Andy: I saw this woman walking towards me.

Jane: Is that the picture?

Andy: Yeah and I fancied the pants off her, and she looked at me and I looked at her and it just clicked. It was like love at first sight and I'd never experienced that in my life, you know and we went back to her house that day. I went to sleep, she ended up cuddling me and falling asleep beside me and a few hours later we went to my friend's house and helped him unpack and she ended up coming to stay at my flat at the time. So we hit it off straight away. She told me all about her children and that they weren't with her and all that.

He later describes how she helped him lessen his alcohol intake: 'If I hadn't have had Angie there to support me, get me out of it again, I'd probably be dead through liver failure or something else.' Specifically, he mentions that she has calmed him down and altered his behaviour by wanting to stay in with her. Daniel also describes his girlfriend as being different, not 'posh' like Luke's, but unlike previous girlfriends

and meeting his needs in a different way. Frosh *et al* (2002) describe how boys often see girls as more mature and 'adult like' than them. They explain:

Almost a third of our sample of 78 described boys as being less serious than girls, and of these nine referred to boys as immature. This was associated with risk-taking, not thinking about the consequences of their actions and not thinking seriously about the future.

(Frosh *et al* 2002:104)

Luke, Dwayne and Daniel attribute their partners with having greater maturity and sense than them. Girls generally, however, are positioned by Dwayne as 'little divs' (an apparently derogatory term) who cause friction between boys. He positions his current partner as special as she does not do this. Thus, Dwayne interprets aspects of femininity and the relationships between the genders differently, according to the effect they have on his relationship with his (male) friends.

Like Dwayne, Luke and Daniel, John also presents his girlfriend, in Episode 17, as an agent of change. He sees her as a facilitator moving him from a delinquent phase of his life to one where he is not dependent upon drugs:

Episode 17

Jane: So, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but is it because of your son it made you change?

John: Yeah, that and my girlfriend. She like helped me through my addiction saying look 'calm it down'. She didn't stop me just like that but she was saying 'listen do this much and then do this much and then do this much.'

'Calm' is a word that both John and Dwayne use when describing their partners' influence on them and their behaviour. Like John, Peter, 24, explains how his partner encouraged him to rescue himself from his drug addiction. I ask how he gave up taking drugs:

Episode 18

Peter: Kelly. She told me it was killing me basically. The thoughts were in my mind already and she just boosted the thoughts I was having and I decided enough was enough. Luckily enough I think I stopped taking them easy compared to a lot of people. But I suppose I had the support to do it.

Peter describes how in Kelly he found someone he was prepared to listen to about his drug taking. Peter describes himself as being ready to give up drugs but needed motivation: 'she's the motivation behind me, she kicks my backside and says 'get on with it'.

5.2.2. The influence of the child

An additional motivation for a change in behaviour for some of the young men is a stated understanding of the consequences of continuing with their previous reckless

way of life, especially the impact this may have on their relationship with their child or children. Dwayne, 17, states in Episode 19 that he wants to be with his child rather than locked up:

Episode 19

Dwayne: Since like I found out my girlfriend was pregnant, I calmed down a lot, didn't want to get in trouble or nothing.

Jane: Why not?

Dwayne: Coz it ain't worth it. I'd only end up in prison, won't be able to do nothing in there for like my daughter and that would I?

Having a child seems to be a strong motivating factor encouraging a positive change in behaviour. This point is significant in the light of much literature on young parents which highlights that having a child is a negative and socially excluding experience for the majority (SEU 1999; Swann *et al* 2003). John, 17, describes how he now considers the harm his continued use would have on his son:

Episode 20

John: Well, the way I look at it, you just can't when you have a baby, you can't really be a little kid no more, you got to grow up so much. I couldn't like do any drugs in front of him, because if I harmed him in any way then I'd never be able to forgive myself.

In Episode 21 I ask Keith, 19, what had motivated him to stop offending. Although his answer is disjointed Keith seems clear that he does not want his past involvement in criminal activities to influence his daughter's behaviour:

Episode 21

Keith: I don't know really, because she's got to try to grow up now and I can't see myself going and doing crime where she can see me doing it, and then she's going to follow me ain't she, in my foot steps and I don't want her doing that.

Jane: What do you want for her then?

Keith: That she has a good life.

Jane: Can you tell me what a good life is?

Keith: Work and that, instead of going out and doing silly things like I done.

Jane: How are you going to help her do that?

Keith: How am I going to help her do that?

Jane: Yeah.

Keith: I'll show her the right way to go.

Jane: Tell me what that is?

Keith: Find and job and [..... 15 seconds](someone comes into the room and leaves)

Jane: You were telling me how-

Keith: Yeah, I would tell her not to go the criminal ways go the straight road, because I don't want to see her going to jail like I done, because jail ain't a good place, ain't good.

In this episode Keith is acknowledging that a criminal identity is a high a price to pay now he has a child, due to the potential effects on his daughter. She may copy his past behaviour and he does not want that for her. Keith describes his belief in his own agency as a father and that his influence on his daughter is significant. He positions himself as central to his daughter's life and development, assuming that his decisions and behaviour will affect her profoundly. Just by 'telling' her not to commit crimes he believes will prevent her from following this path. Keith is situated in a family where criminality and anti- social behaviour are the norm, with his oldest brother a heroin addict and the second oldest recently released from prison for burglary. He also mentions that he has step- and half-siblings on the fringes of criminality. Keith, however, feels that his role as a father will be enough to deter his daughter from continuing deviant behaviour in his family. In Episode 22, I ask Keith if he sees himself changing as a father as his daughter grows up. Keith frames his answer in terms of him keeping out of trouble and the current strategies he uses to do this:

Episode 22

Keith: I do, because I ain't been in trouble for nearly nine months now, so I'm keeping out of it because I've got my car out there and it needs wheel bearings and as I'm doing that it'll keep me out of trouble. But when I got nothing to do gets me bored and gets me back into crime.

Jane: Right, OK and your brother's keeping out of it?

Keith: Yeah, my brother Ross has been out about a month and he hasn't been in trouble yet, and Kevin. So if they keep out of trouble it'll be good. See I want to keep out of trouble just for my daughter's sake, that's it.

He emphasises that he wants to keep out of trouble for his daughter's sake; a clear motivation for a new identity. However, he also makes the link between boredom and crime, a well-documented theme in research with young offenders (Dennison and Coleman 2000). Keith's strategy to alleviate the boredom and divert himself from crime is to work on his car. Johnston *et al* (2000) found that young people who were involved in criminal activities at a very early age, such as 12 or 13, were more likely to develop 'criminal careers' and progress into more serious crime and drug use especially if they had few other outlets for their time and energy. For some young men, becoming a parent at a young age, whilst an indicator of social exclusion in itself (SEU 1999), may provide a different, more optimistic path.

Dwayne, 17, also emphasises this point by talking about missing his daughter if he carried on with crime and ended up in prison. Talking about being in contact again with his own father and his recent offer of a job with him, Dwayne, like Keith, makes the link between boredom and offending:

Episode 23

Dwayne: He (his dad) wants to see me settle down and that, he don't want me in court and that no more. I've been in court for ages, like two years and that, all that time. He just wants me to keep out of trouble and that and he says he has got me a job.

Jane: How do you feel about that?

Dwayne: Yeah, like doing things will keep me out of trouble in case I get bored and that, led astray again, but I don't think I would get led astray again.

Jane: Why not?

Dwayne: Don't know. It's just too much to lose in there. If I go in prison then I miss her growing up and that, depends on how long I go in prison for, but I still miss like a couple of months while she's growing up, though and that would be just gutting.

In their research on young people in transition Johnston *et al* (2000:3) remark that 'individuals' movements into and out of drug use and criminal activity were complex, varied and often dependent upon other experiences'. They found influential factors in preventing involvement included the formation of new personal relationships.

Webster *et al* (2006) reiterate this point and state:

...criminal careers, once begun, did not always follow a steady course.

Unpredictable 'critical moments' sometimes turned people away from criminal careers, sometimes towards them. The spur to desistance sometimes comes from particularly traumatic 'critical moments'.

(Webster *et al* 2006:16)

In the study in this thesis forming a new relationship with their child is presented as a motivating factor in deterring some young men from future criminal activity.

However, although the children were presented as a significant factor in their own right some young men, like Dwayne and Keith, express that they also need legitimate

outlets for their time, mainly in the form of work to further encourage this distance from anti-social and deviant behaviour.

The findings from this research with the ten young men regarding the importance they placed on the relationships with their partner and child has similarities with the conclusions of work by Laub and Sampson (2003) in the US and the observation by MacDonald and Marsh (2005:185) of the 'purposefulness of parenting' in halting the drift of teenage delinquency as well as the comment by Webster *et al* (2006) that the establishment of partnerships can be critical in sustaining desistance from crime. The work of Laub and Sampson, which features older men reflecting back on their lives, uses a life history approach, encouraging the men to frame and describe the events which had taken place in their lives. The authors emphasise the importance that the men in their study placed on the role of family, in particular meeting their wives, forming new attachments and making new social networks. Laub and Sampson argue that forming a partnership which leads to marriage was 'implicated as a predictor of desistance from crime amongst men' (Laub and Sampson 2003:43) as was having children. Both these factors were significant in encouraging the men away from past criminal peer groups and activities.

The participants discussed in this chapter were not married to their partners and most, but not all, of the relationships were recently formed. However, there is some similarity in the way the young men in the research in this thesis identified critical relationships particularly that their partner was positively different from previous girlfriends, and in the way they described their partners and children as having a constructive and helpful influence on them. Moreover, the young fathers described

here also portrayed looking to the future with a different perspective now they were, or were about to become, fathers. In addition, they talked about spending time with their partner and young family and how they had drawn away from their peers, removing themselves from situations where they could become involved in future delinquent activities. Indeed, the realisation of what they had to lose from the recent investments they had made in the relationships with their partner and baby was a clear message from some young men. John, 17, outlines this in Episode 24:

Episode 24

John: I want to see my little boy grow up. I don't want to end up in prison.

Fear, that is a lot of the thing, some people haven't got fear of prison. But [.....] I suppose in a way I haven't got fear of it, but at the same time I don't want to miss my little boy growing from this to this, just for a stupid car.

Moreover, according to Jay, 19, his relationship with his partner is based on the investment he has in providing for his child:

Episode 25

Jay: We got this baby everything mate, everything, ain't we darling? Absolutely everything – too right and all, trainers and fucking, excuse my French, got all his toys ain't we, swinging thing, he loves it mate, got everything.

5.3 Taking up positions of responsibility

The previous section outlined how the young men described themselves as being rescued by the relationships they had with their partner and child, either from their addiction to drugs or from their involvement in crime and delinquency. Their overall narratives tend to illustrate, through smaller episodes or stories, how their lives have generally moved from the negative associations with previous poor and/or abusive family relationships, through offending, criminality, involvement with drugs, alcohol and fighting, to being rescued by their current relationship and situation. Part of this continued progressive positioning of their lives is provided in their descriptions of embracing the responsibility which accompanies being a parent. Although this section relates to the stories of ten young men, all of the young fathers interviewed for this study talk about responsibility, albeit in differing ways and their sense of responsibility is explored further in Chapter Six where they talk about their roles in family life. The difference in how they talk about responsibility, in particular for Mark and Paul, is the way in which they position other characters (specifically their partners) in achieving this responsibility.

Returning to the young fathers discussed in this chapter, two clear patterns emerge from their stories regarding the concept of responsibility. Firstly, the young men who are 'fathers in waiting' imply that they have the potential to be responsible and to further change their persona and identities with the birth of their child. I have called this a position of 'virtual' responsibility, where the young men are trying out or imagining what their lives will be and how they will behave. Secondly, are the kinds of responsibilities described by the young men whose children have already been born.

5.3.1. Episodes of 'virtual' responsibility

She said she was pregnant and I thought, I want that. (Victor age 16.)

At the time of his interview Victor was 16 and still at school waiting to sit his GCSE examinations. He clearly has a vision of himself, set out in Episode 26, as a provider for both his partner and his baby:

Episode 26

Victor: I'm going to go, when I leave, well I'm going to get a job [.....]fitting windows for a little while because I know how to do it and it's quite good money in it, if you know what you do. Do that till the baby's born just so I've a little bit of money, and then when we settle down and got out own place somewhere, then I'll go and get an apprenticeship as electrician, plumber or do a bit of building.

Victor and Luke are both fathers in waiting and locate themselves as wanting to provide for their new families. At the moment Victor is prevented from doing this as he is still at school, although currently on exam leave. Luke, although a year younger than Victor, has a job with his father, due to him being permanently excluded from school. This is an unusual position and is perhaps indicative of Luke's dislike and negative experiences of school:

Episode 27

Jane: Can you take me through an ordinary day?

Luke: Ordinary day, well I get up in the morning at half five, quarter to six and go to work.

Jane: With your dad?

Luke: Yeah. Do all the work and that.

Jane: What work do you do?

Luke: Roofing, do the work, leave about half two, three o'clock, come home if its on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday come home, have a bath and go to boxing. From boxing, come out about nine, half eight, nine, go and get a MacDonald's, get the train home, and when I get home Clare's probably asleep.

Both Luke and Victor mentioned the importance of working in their narratives and clearly saw themselves in the role of a provider for their future family. For Luke, this involvement in work and legitimate leisure interests takes him away from his partner for the greater part of the day. This is mentioned by some of the young men in Chapter 6 regarding their narratives of their own fathering, echoing stories of traditional patterns of masculinity and fathering. Although Luke describes working hard to move himself away from previous antisocial distractions by building himself a life without delinquency, it may be that this will cause tensions in the future, particularly as his partner has cut herself off from her own family and is living with Luke and his father. Indeed, in Luke's case one can detect a focus on himself, in Episode 28, even when talking about what he does with his partner:

Episode 28

Jane: Do you go out together anywhere?

Luke: We go, Saturdays and Sundays we go either football up the park or something, we went swimming a couple of times, cinema been there once. We'll go to the pub, when I go to the pub, because there's a pub five doors away called 'The B***'(pub name) it's like a local pub, like me dad's local pub because I go and have a couple of games of pool probably there. I don't drink though.**

In this excerpt we see Luke explaining what he and his partner do together. It is possible to see how difficult it is for a young man to embrace many changes all at once, for example in Luke's case changing behaviour and trying to improve oneself, be a teenager, renew a relationship as a son, keep out of trouble, be a supportive partner and a potential father. These roles all require competing, differing identities which require complex juggling. Victor also explains his view of the future:

Episode 29

Jane: OK, take me through a typical day then, Victor.

Victor: Usually I would have gone to school then come home, give my girlfriend a ring, maybe have a shower, go jump on the train and go and see my girlfriend. Now I'm not at school got to go and look for a job, I'll be waking up at 5-ish, go to work, fix some windows, work round the country, come home, have a nice long bath, dinner on the table and then go to bed with my girlfriend.

Both Luke and Victor are young men whose identities are produced within the discourses available to them, and they both describe seeing themselves as providers and engaging with traditional gender roles (one of the discourses outlined in Chapter Two) and approaches to family life. His vision of the future presents Victor in a particularly traditional model of a relationship and of masculinity, with his girlfriend meeting his need for food when he comes in from work and with the implied message of meeting his sexual needs in bed. Considering the upheaval and tragedy described in a childhood dominated by his parents' drug abuse, Victor can be seen as projecting a desire for a more 'conventional' life.

In addition, both Luke and Victor are clear that they want to have their own private space following the birth of the child. Victor refers to this previously and Luke, below in Episode 30, displays a sense of his own agency, at the age of 15, negotiating with external agencies in an attempt to secure accommodation:

Episode 30

Luke: I'm trying to get a house like, going down the council trying to get a house and they said they could. My dad and all that is writing in saying he's chucking us out and all that and they'll get us a house but it won't be in S*** (place)**

Jane: Where will it be?

Luke: About 45 mins an hours drive away they said, but I want one in S*** (place).**

At 15 it is possible that Luke does not have much power to negotiate with the statutory agencies regarding accommodation. However, he is clear that he wants to stay in the area where he is currently living. The narratives of both these young men suggest that they want to assume the identity of provider and be financially responsible for their new family.

5.3.2. Talking about responsibility: young men already fathers

For the young men who were already fathers, responsibility was an issue which was storied based on recent experience. Although I did not ask a direct question about being responsible, the issue was talked about in two main ways. Firstly, the sense of regret at wasting the teenage years. Secondly, by being confronted in their own communities with similar anti-social behaviour they described engaging in, forcing them into the role of a protector to their young families.

In Episode 31 Daniel, 18, expresses his regret at wasting money:

Episode 31

Daniel: Now I realise that all the money I've wasted when I've been working [.....]drinking, like when I've been going out with my mates having a drink, I should have saved it for a rainy day really.

Jane: What do you think the baby needs?

Daniel: She don't need nothing, but if I'd saved all that money we could have been in our house by now.

For Daniel, like Victor and Luke, the priority of space for his new family to be together is pressing, as he is currently living with his father whilst his partner and baby are living with her parents. At the time of the interview he was waiting to hear from his 'boss' about a potential place to rent. Queniert (2004) argues that the desire for and achievement of personal space marks a definitive transition to the adult world for young fathers and a signal to the outside world that this is a new family and they are at the head of it. Being separated, particularly with the mother and baby living elsewhere, causes tensions, allows the interference of others in the relationship and inhibits the exercise of responsibility. Daniel describes feeling like this in the episode below:

Episode 32

Daniel: I was seeing it (the baby) every day but then there was an argument on the house and her dad started going off his head and that and he said to me that you're not allowed in the house no more, so then that obviously caused me and Sally to have an argument, we split up, well we didn't split up, we was having a break. I was picking Paige up every Saturday and looking after her and then I went and then we got back together and now she comes down here every weekend.

The argument with Sally's father is symptomatic of the evolving relationships in families brought about by the birth of a child. Sally is her father's daughter, living in his house; she is also Daniel's girlfriend and has roles with each of them as well as

her own agency. For Daniel and Sally, living in two separate places is not conducive to privacy or to establishing the intimacy of a new family unit (Queniart 2004) and is preventing Daniel from exercising his responsibilities to them. Later in his interview Daniel indicates that Sally now visits his father's house at the weekend, indicating that the location for the family has now changed following her father's outburst.

Taking up a position of responsibility is also described by some of the young men as adopting a protective identity towards their new family unit. As Manuel, 22, explains in the following brief extract:

Episode 33

Jane: How is being a dad different from the life you had before?

Manuel: It just made me realise there is [.....] more responsibilities. I was going to be a father. I needed to try and make sure that my wife and children was safe and secure and that if they ever needed me, they could always come to me. I think that made me realise that it was time to sort my life out and get my act together.

Manuel explains how he has had to assume a reliable and dependable identity and be available to his wife and children, a totally different identity from driving stolen cars recklessly at 80 mph. He claims this reliable identity is difficult to maintain as, ironically for him, his family home regularly comes under 'bombardment' from local youths who throw stones and abuse at him and his family:

Episode 34

Manuel: We get a load of youths outside, throwing stones at your windows, whacking doors and the children get really scared, saying 'come and get us, come and get us'.

Jane: How do you deal with that?

Manuel: I don't really know. I have been outside and had a couple of go's at the kids. Not physical, but just shouting out of the windows and that tends to make the problem worse. Erm we have phoned the police and the council.

Jane: How do you deal with the kids though? How do you deal with their worry?

Manuel: Normally we sit there and try to reassure them that no one is going to hurt them and no one is going to get them. But, as I say, I find it really difficult, because I have always said to myself that I will always make sure the kids are secure. But they are not. For me it is a very difficult life trying to explain to your children that no one is going to hurt them, it is very, very[.....] what is the word?].....] very, very hard. It is not something that is easy to explain to a child of 2 or 3.

Jane: OK. So you told me that you used to race around the streets and maybe do a bit of that behaviour yourself.

Manuel: I did do some of that but I was never as bad as they are now. I wouldn't have deliberately thrown stones at people's windows or things like that. I wouldn't harm anyone. The kids now don't seem to care who they upset or what they upset.

In the episode above we see Manuel experiencing an ideological dilemma (Billing *et al* 1998) whereby two discourses, one of youth and 'recklessness' (to which he used to belong), and the other of fatherhood and 'responsibility', have collided. Hall's view of 'identities as temporary points of attachment' can provide insight into what may be happening here for Manuel:

I use identity to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture between on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate' speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be spoken.

(Hall 2003:19)

Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. In earlier episodes Manuel tells us of his involvement in taking and driving stolen cars. In Episode 34 we see him distancing himself from these past actions and adopting an adult discourse on the 'youth of today' being worse than in his day, in order to excuse his past behaviours and reconcile his two contradictory identities. To use Hall's language, he is being 'hailed' by a discourse of adult responsibility and is attaching himself to it; the temporary attachment to, or position within, the discourse of 'recklessness' has gone.

In Episode 34 it can be seen how Manuel tries to justify his current position as an adult father and protector and yet, at the same time trying to defend his previous actions as a teenager. According to positioning theory and specifically ideas about

personhood (Davis and Harre 1989), individuals are not coherent, unified 'wholes'. Rather they shift from one way of thinking about themselves as the discourses available to them change (Davies and Harre 1989). Manuel is presenting to me his case for a change in identity to a responsible, protective figure. With fatherhood the discourses available to him and his subsequent moral position have changed. I challenge his evolving 'responsible story' and remind him of a contradictory story he told previously about his own past behaviour.

Peter outlines a similar dilemma to that of Manuel. He tells how 'every night' there is trouble from 'little buggers' who vandalise his car or smash up other people's houses. I ask Peter if he can see any similarities between how the young people are behaving and what he did in the past. Peter, 24, like Manuel, adopts a stance associated with adult status, reflecting on how his own past behaviour was not as bad as that of young people today and exploring the different moral codes on offer.

Also of interest in these two episodes is how I deliberately present these two participants with the contradictions they have presented to me in their overall narratives between their past and present identities. In the process of the co-construction I am encouraging them to interpret and re-interpret their story, rather than just let them tell me. Although, as mentioned previously in Chapter Two, narratives are always subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation by the individual (Hyden 1994), I am acting as an agent in this reinterpretation:

Episode 35

Peter: Erm. When I was younger I had different morals if you like. It's like these little buggers up here, they don't care if there is a baby seat in the car and things like that, they will still take the car and that. Believe it or not, that is things I wouldn't do, if there was a baby seat in there I wouldn't touch it. Silly little things like that.

Jane: Why? A car is a car, isn't it?

Peter: No not really. It is [.....] in my day it was [.....] especially if then someone was driving a big old Jaguar you knew they had money, well they might not have had money, but its just one of them things, if they have a big car they have lots of money. It's like you come down here and take a look at the cars here and you think 'well they are working for their living'. You can tell a lot of things about a person's car.

To my knowledge Peter and Manuel do not know each other. However, they both produced similar episodes which enable them to distance themselves from current antisocial behaviour and move nearer to 'acceptable' forms of behaviour associated with responsible adulthood. Peter draws on a 'Robin Hood' ethic to justify his previous position, that he only stole from the rich but the young 'buggers' of today are breaking a moral code by stealing from poorer people in his neighbourhood. His stance in Episode 35 is also directly related to children, whereby he explains that stealing a car with a child seat in it is presented as being further down a moral chain than stealing a car without one. Arguably, he is acknowledging his past reckless identity but positioning himself as a rogue with a moral code, a person who could always be trusted with small children, thus linking up his old and new identities through the thread of a sympathetic attitude towards children. He indicates that he has

always been able to identify with people who have children, even before becoming a father himself.

Davies and Harre (1989) argue that individuals often have to undergo a process of 'complex weaving together' of different positions, which are available in any number of discourses. Each position has emotional meaning, based upon personal experience, and is located within a particular moral system. Davis and Harre explain:

Because of the social/grammatical construction of the person as a unitary knowable identity we tend to assume it is only possible to have made a set of consistent choices located within only one discourse. And it is true we do struggle with the diversity of experience to produce a story of ourselves which is unitary and consistent. If we don't, others demand of us that we do.

(Davis and Harre 1989:49)

In the exchanges with Manuel and Peter, I am the one challenging their apparent contradictions. I have acknowledged that the two identities which they have both presented to me are not consistent and I am asking for clarification regarding their current positions. The way they both try to reconcile the two fragmented and contradictory identities is to acknowledge their past antisocial behaviour but distance themselves from it by using a 'we were never as bad as that' approach. In addition, by focussing on 'the youth of today', the focus of attention is switched away from their past actions and onto current delinquents with their poor contemporary moral codes.

5.4. Repositioning: some tensions between the transition to adulthood and being a young father

Becoming a parent at any age is arguably a life-changing event or series of events (Oakely 1979). Moving from becoming an individual or couple to the inclusion of another dependent being is associated with physical and mental changes and challenges. As the evidence set out in Chapter One argued, pregnancy and the birth of a child in the early to mid-teenage years is problematised and is generally regarded as having poor consequences for both parent and child (Hudson and Ineichen 1991; SEU 1999; Swann *et al* 2003). As the previous section has argued, however, this may not always be the case and for some young men becoming a father may have positive outcomes for them, their partner and child.

For young people, however, early parenthood can bring a clash between teenage and adult discourses. Whilst all of the ten young men considered here have positioned their overall narratives progressively, arguing that their lives have generally improved having moved from recklessness to responsibility, there are episodes which describe some of the difficulties of becoming a young father, and how different it is from being a teenager without responsibilities. John, 17, summarises this feeling:

Episode 36

John: It makes you like grown up really.

Jane: Do you like that feeling?

John: Yeah. I wish sometimes I was still, do you know what I mean, a kid, because I'm only seventeen. I can't do the things I want to do like go out every day, play football with my mates and having a few beers or something. Instead I've got to stop my baby from crying and clean the nappies.

The tensions between the expectations of adolescence and adulthood are apparent for John. Although previously John described his girlfriend as saving him from his teenage addiction to drink, he admits that he is still tempted by a youthful identity and its association with freedom. Moreover, some of the ten young men point out the distrust and tensions within adolescent relationships (Hudson and Ineichen 1991).

Talking about his partner John explains:

Episode 37

John: It's just because like it's mucked up my life. I can't go out and do what I want when I want like a normal person my age that ain't got a kid. Like say if I wanted to go out clubbing then, I don't want to go out on my own because she gets paranoid about me and I get paranoid about her, so we would rather go out together and we can't for obvious reasons. Not even if we wanted to go out and see a film at the cinema, babies are not allowed in the cinema, are they, so...

Hudson and Ineichen (1991) point out that young relationships are fraught with tensions even without the added responsibility of parenthood. As Episode 37 suggests, the parameters of trust in a relationship have to be negotiated, with young people navigating being a 'couple' as well as being parents. As identified in Chapter One, the

quality of the relationship between a father and the mother is a significant 'determinant of paternal involvement' (Gavin *et al* 2002:10). The authors argue that continued romantic investment between couples encourages the ongoing participation of the father with positive outcomes for the long term development of the child. Understanding the causes of stress and tension from the perspective of the young father can aid professional intervention (this is a point which will be returned to in Chapter Six). For example in Episode 38, Manuel, 22, admits how hard he finds it to keep both his wife and children happy:

Episode 38

Jane: How do you find being a dad and a husband? How do you find that?

Manuel: Very difficult. Trying to keep everybody happy is very difficult. Spend too much time with the kids and then Kelly will get jealous, spend too much time with Kelly and the kids will get jealous. I find it very difficult to mix with both, if you know what I mean.

Jane: So how do you deal with it? How do you sort it out?

Manuel: [.....] Good question.

Manuel: When we first had the children I wasn't very aware of it at all. Me and Kelly had some really big arguments about it. It was all Kelly or the kids. But as time goes on you kind of grow up and realise that you need to spend a certain amount of time with each other and try and share the time that you have got. I am better in the morning with the kids and then when they go to school it allows me and Kelly to do what she wants to do.

Manuel describes the intimate relationships within his family and how difficult it has been for him to position himself to please all parties. He expresses that with the responsibility of fatherhood there are problems which he describes resolving by presenting fluid identities. Wetherell and Edley (1999) remark that the men they interviewed were accomplished at adopting a wide variety of identity positions. For Manuel it appears that this accomplishment came about following a period of conflict with his partner. This realisation is again a long way from the selfish depiction of a younger Manuel who stole cars and drove them dangerously without thought for the consequences.

In Episode 39 below Keith, 19, also describes the different identities he adopts with his family. He describes how he relaxes when he, his partner and baby go to stay at her parents' house:

Episode 39

Jane: What do you do when you are over there?

Keith: Play with her brothers because she's got three, four brothers and I play with them. The oldest one's sixteen so we just walk up the sea front and get on the swings and that and they got this spinney thing in the park there and it goes that way and that was when you spin it and...it holds you there like that and where it goes so fast, when I go and jump on it I go 'phew' and slip back off. Well funny, you ain't got nothing to hold on it's just spinning really fast and you go to jump and fling.

Jane: So you enjoy that?

Keith: Yeah.

Jane: What else do you do?

Keith: That's it really, just go round the park, he's got a little hovercraft we take that in there, so we play with that and all.

This excerpt is significant as it is one of Keith's longest replies. The episode shows his animation when describing what he does in his spare time. Keith uses the word 'play' three times in this excerpt, not a word adults generally use to describe their activities. It is interesting to note that he does not relate his activities to the enjoyment that his daughter may gain from playing in the park now or in the future, but rather the activities are framed in terms of his enjoyment – emphasising the ongoing childlike nature of his own needs. Keith's overall narrative alters his position within and between discourses. On one occasion he describes engaging in childlike play, in another he portrays himself as a teenager on the cusp of adulthood and involving himself in 'doing up' his car and furthermore, realising his responsibilities to his family by keeping out of trouble.

Daniel, 18, draws attention to the subtle ongoing pressure he feels he has from his peers, who are not fathers, to join in with their activities:

Episode 40

Jane: How do your mates see you being a young dad, what do they say?

Daniel: They all take the mickey out of me saying I'm 'under the thumb' and I can't go out and all that, but there ain't no point going out when you've got responsibilities, you can't go out can you?

Jane: How do you feel about that then?

Daniel: It don't bother me really. It's nice to go out like on a Friday once you've finished work, you think oh yeah I want to go and have a drink but I do go out after work a couple of times a week, once in a blue moon, but then Tuesday's and Thursdays I go out and play darts. Sally comes along with me, her mum looks after the baby and it's alright. I don't need to go out every night.

A key feature of this episode is the way in which Daniel has turned a negative representation by his friends that he is under the control of a woman, into a positive representation of himself and Sally as a couple. The implication is that he has moved on in his social activities as a couple rather than as a single man, a step associated with long term positive implications for keeping out of trouble (Laub and Sampson 2003). He also asks for my validation of his position, asking 'you can't go out can you?' I do not answer him but direct the question back to him, asking how he feels. Daniel describes having to make a choice and he has aligned himself with his partner over his friends. This is a point taken up by Luke. He distances or 'others' (Connell 1995) his previous friends who are not fathers. He moves on in the construction of his identity which is consistent with the message he has been giving throughout the narrative, that he is now sensible and assuming a grown up identity. I ask Luke, 15, if any of his other friends have children:

Episode 41

Luke: One's on the way, one of my friends is on the way like me.

Jane: Right, and how is he with it all?

Luke: He's cushty, he thinks it's cushty he does like me

Jane: What's so good about it though?

Luke: Because all of us friends all of us boys, because there's loads of boys yeah, two sensible ones, me and my friend, two sensiblest ones, the ones who had the baby, the other ones go around shagging anyone and they ain't got nothing and all that; the sensible ones got babies

Luke's reasoning is at odds here with contemporary discourses on young parenthood. He identifies that being a young father equates with being sensible and he is distancing himself from behaviour which is not sensible, i.e. those who are still 'shagging' around but have not yet got children. The child is positioned as a 'prize' which he now has access to and others do not. Luke does not make the link that it was presumably the 'shagging around' which gives him the current status of a father-to-be. The extract with Luke also reverses the discourses explored in some of the research in Chapter One, that teenage pregnancy and young parenthood are signs of irresponsibility and social exclusion. Luke reinterprets this discourse, associating those without children at his age as being the ones who are irresponsible.

5.5 Recklessness, rescue and responsibility: a brief summary

The young men considered in this chapter told their stories of the early transition to fatherhood in similar ways. Significant events and significant people, particularly

meeting their current partner and either the prospect or actually becoming a young father, were described as affecting their transition experience from one associated with recklessness to one embracing responsibility and the desistance from crime and anti-social behaviour. As Thomson *et al* (2002) maintain, 'critical moments' can change the route of a transition experience. For the group of young men depicted in this chapter, the process of becoming a father is described as having a positive effect on their lives, social relationships and identity formation.

As previously stated, research and academic literature on young parents often presents them and the outcomes for them negatively. Detailed analysis of the small group of young men in this chapter suggests that becoming a young father, though not without difficulties and tensions, may have positive implications for their identity construction. The young men considered here describe positioning and repositioning themselves and others positively, as well as re-inventing their identities within and between many competing discourses. In addition, they describe undergoing this process in the full view of their peers and within fragmented, difficult and sometimes distressing past and present family circumstances.

An analysis of the literature suggests that the focus for support with young parents is usually on the mother (Swann *et al* 2003), to help her to cope and adjust to motherhood. Undoubtedly this focus is important especially with teenage pregnancy rates at their current high rate. However, understanding the needs of young fathers, through their own stories, would also seem to be a priority especially in the light of seeing the transition to young fatherhood as a process which may have positive and negative influences.

For the young men considered in this chapter, the birth of their child was described as a positive experience allowing them the opportunity to distance themselves from previous past, antisocial behaviour and embrace responsibility. In places, however, their narratives are tempered with the challenges and tensions that being a teenager, young man and young father can have. On the basis of these findings I would argue that professional attention needs to harness the positive, if difficult, renegotiations depicted by some young men during the transition to fatherhood as there are points during the process when they may need help. For example, in moving their lives on and distancing themselves from previous anti-social behaviour and influences, as well as helping them negotiate their identities and relationships as fathers. The professional focus, therefore, needs to be on both the young father and the young mother during the transition to parenthood, as they are both part of the equation and may both need help adjusting to their future roles.

The next chapter moves on from the focus on the transition to fatherhood to look at how all the young fathers referred to in this study describe positioning themselves, their families and professionals as agents of *support* following their new roles as young fathers.

CHAPTER SIX

STORIES OF FAMILY LIFE, PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

6.0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will analyse the ways in which all the young men in this study talk about their personal relationships and the types of support they offer and receive following their recent transition to fatherhood. As Chapter Five suggested, some young fathers described a change from a 'reckless' adolescent identity being influenced by their partner and impending or recent experience of fatherhood. As Reay (2002) argues, families are the first sites where masculine identities are formed and influenced. It is argued in this chapter that by interacting and revisiting relationships with family members during the life course, individuals continue to shape their identities. To return to Harre and Van Langenhove's (1999) terminology, during the interviews the young men deliberately positioned themselves and others, including wider family and social characters. Harre and Van Langenhove remark on this process:

When the person is absent then this positioning can be understood as gossiping.

Sabine and Silver (1982) have convincingly argued that gossiping can be understood as a medium of self disclosure. In taking a stance about another's behaviour people also 'dramatise' themselves; it points to behaviour which could be but is not the

behaviour of the person who is gossiping. The discursive act of gossiping also positions the persons involved in the gossiping.

(Harre and Van Langenhove 1999:27).

The process of 'gossiping' was a crucial part of the stories discussed in the previous chapter, where the young men described their partners and children and placed themselves in relation to them. The process of positioning self and others acted as a form of self disclosure for their own masculine identity construction. Similarly, by gossiping with me in the interview about wider family members, the young men situated family relationships and implicated others in their identity formation.

When exploring the interaction and influence of family relationships of all of the young fathers in this study, it is significant to remember that at the time of the interview all of them were users of social services. Many had been involved in past negative relationships with members of their families and some of these relationships were still strained. As previously mentioned Reissman (1993, 1994, 2001, 2003) argues that analysis of narratives told during a crisis or a time of stress, offers a unique perspective on the wider social and cultural discourses within which individuals move. The stories told by the socially excluded young fathers in this study include descriptions of their often complex webs of family and social relationships, as well as the skills and strategies they employ to cope.

The chapter is divided in to four sections. The first section will look at the family relationships the young men describe, including how they portray the support offered by their mothers and the changing relationships with their fathers. The chapter will

then move on to look at how some of the participants describe negotiating new forms of support, for example traversing relationships with their partner's parents. Thirdly, how the young men position themselves as agents of support will be examined and fourthly, how professional support is represented by the young fathers.

6.1. Complex lives, complicated family relationships

Many users of social services do not have access to support from their families (Aldgate 1997). They have complex, fragmented lives and difficult, unpredictable family circumstances (Biehal and Wade 1996; Allen 2003; Aldgate 1997). This is not a new theme within social work and indeed underpins a vast amount of social work intervention and support, dealing with the complexity of individual situations. The combination of poverty and poor physical and mental health often contributes to a cycle of poor parenting. Families with poor support networks are particularly vulnerable to problems and consequently to social work intervention (Waterhouse and McGhee 1998). Waterhouse and McGhee highlight the link between poverty and negative outcomes:

Problems in the poorest areas are found to have increased, with high rates of family break up, high levels of crime, vandalism and youth unemployment, and growing numbers of children registered with local authorities as at risk of abuse.

(Waterhouse and McGhee 1998:275)

Social policy under the Labour Government promotes understanding of these 'joined up' entrenched issues and negative outcomes under the umbrella of social exclusion.

As previously stated, this approach argues that negative issues are not purely a result of poverty but due to a combination of problems that may include unemployment, engaging in anti-social behaviour (ASB), poor health and inadequate housing. This perspective argues that these interlinked factors can lead to marginalisation and disadvantage for individuals. New Labour policy in the UK has argued that social exclusion should be tackled primarily by inclusion in paid work. As Chapter Five pointed out the majority of the young fathers in this study were, at the time of the interview, without work and described experiencing poor educational opportunities, previous association with anti-social behaviour (ASB) and poor family relationships. As this chapter will explore, these factors, amongst others, had implications for the way that they fathered.

Social work theory and practice reflect the complexity of individual family and social relationships which are often exacerbated by poverty, unemployment and social exclusion (Parrott 2002). Parrott (2002) emphasises that many socially excluded individuals are users of social services and he argues that understanding social and family support networks and the different types of support needed during the life cycle is invaluable to social workers in order to work effectively with a variety of service users. As Chapter One demonstrated, the majority of studies on young parents have focussed on the type of support available to young mothers (Tabberer *et al* 2000; Allen and Dowling 1998; Corlyon and McGuire 1997) including young fathers as part of the mother's support network. Chapter Five argued that even young men who construct the move to fatherhood positively, experience strains and tensions, leading to the conclusion that young fathers need help in their own right. As previously identified there has been less emphasis in the literature on looking at the *types* of

support that are helpful to young fathers. The aim of this section is to explore the (often negative) stories the young men in this study tell about the networks of support in their birth families as well as their descriptions of the changing dynamics within their new families and extended support networks just prior to and following the birth of their child. The aim is to analyse the quantity and quality of support they describe being available to them and the strategies they use to deal with these relationships.

6.1.1. Parental influences on young fathers

During the interviews opportunities emerged for the young fathers to describe both the families they grew up in and also their new families and extended support networks deriving from their partnership with the mother of their child. Many of the young men used discrete episodes in their overall narratives to describe past and ongoing support they had experienced from members of their family of origin. They explained how they felt supported even if, in some instances, their family relationships were complex and at times negative. Most of them drew on stories about their parents but other family members were also presented as offering advice and support. For example, a few young men already mentioned in Chapter Five attached significance to their grandmothers. Victor and John also briefly described how important their siblings had been to them, looking after them and offering advice. For example, in the episode below John describes the influence of his older brother who he represents as being in a similar situation to himself, with a partner and young baby, as well as having a care and offending history. John, 17, claims that his brother gave him advice and guidance when he became a father which he has subsequently tried to follow:

Episode 1

John: Yeah, my brother said to me 'listen', that was what my brother said to me, he said 'you're not going to be able to do this, you're not going to be able to do that, you've got to give up drugs, do you know what I mean? You've got to put your head on'. His exact words were 'put your head on'.

For most of the young men, however, it is parental influence which is placed centrally in their lives, both positively and negatively. Keith, Mark, Shane, Andy, Sid, Jay, Paul, Manuel, Ben, Adam, Dwayne, Luke and Victor all outline the importance of their parents in their lives and describe the differing influences they have had on them, as well as the varied positions their parents have taken up since the young man became a father.

Keith and Mark, for example, describe the harsh regimes that existed in their families, often resulting in physical punishment for them. Keith describes how important his parents still are at this stage in his life, at a time when many teenagers are becoming independent. He describes his inability to read or write, due to his lack of schooling, and mentions his daily reliance on his mother to interpret letters and read him the paper. Keith's partner and baby live with him but he does not describe turning to his partner to fulfil these tasks for him, instead he maintains the role of a dependent son with his mother. At the time of the interview Keith was not working and he described being reliant on his parents financially and for supplying accommodation for him and his new family, in very cramped, over-crowded conditions (research diary).

In Episode 2 below Keith, 19, describes how he and his family are excluded by others in the local neighbourhood. From his description it appears that his family are a tight unit arguing and fighting amongst themselves, indeed with past violence towards each other, but united against the local community. I ask how he and his family get on with their neighbours, having noticed when I approached their house that several CCTV cameras were erected in their neighbours' gardens (research diary) focussed upon Keith's house and garden:

Episode 2

Keith: They don't like us next door there, but these are all right and all the rest down the road are all right because he's got a camera on her garden.

Jane: Has he?

Keith: Yeah and his boy's just been done for noncing¹, see my dad's getting on a solicitor and tell him to move the camera because we've got our little baby girls here now and his boys have just been done for noncing¹. My dad's going to get me a solicitor to write to him and say 'move your camera off our property and put it onto you own property instead of having it on us.'

Jane: Right, why has he got a camera up there?

Keith: I don't know. He's Neighbourhood Watch and whatever we do around here, car parking, he goes back to the council and tells them, so we can't do nothing here, but I don't take no notice of him I still do it. When the council woman comes to my mum, I say 'that car's mine, do it to me not my mum'.

¹ A slang term for sexual abuse generally understood to mean sexual behaviour with children by an adult

This episode describes how marginalised his family are within the local community and also demonstrates how central Keith's parents are to his life. He portrays his father as acting as a facilitator for him, gaining access to a solicitor, and how he protects his mother in the face of outside threat. His parents are positioned as his protectors, supporting a dependent identity even though he is now a father himself.

Underlying stories of past violence by parents are a feature of Mark's narrative and his descriptions indicate how this violence is still influencing him. Mark tells how he and his brother were sexually abused by his 'uncle'; 'when we was younger we just got sexually abused' and in Episodes 3 and 4 how he was physically punished by his father. He describes how this past violence is influencing his current identity as a father and the relationship he has with his partner. Daniel and Taylor (2001) outline the interplay that individual, familial and social factors have on parenting and intimate relationships. They emphasise the theme of victimisation which often emerges in working with men:

When men are given the opportunity to reflect upon their current problems they often begin to describe difficult childhood experiences, especially of brutality. They recall instances of violence from their fathers or stepfathers and intimidation in the classroom and playground.

(Daniel and Taylor 2001:221-222).

In the episodes below Mark, 18, details his difficult childhood and the brutality he experienced as a child:

Episode 3

Mark: I know I used to get a good old hiding of it, I can remember it.

Jane: So quite rough then?

Mark: Yeah.

Jane: Did you get hit a lot?

Mark: Where they've been brought up is, my mum's a P*** (family name) and she's lived around here all her life and she used to get treated rough herself, my granddad was a boatman and he used to, if he didn't get his own way, because he would not lift a cup. That's how my granddad was, and that's how my Nan put me as. My Nan's like my carer because my mum's not here. If anything's got to go wrong I just got to go there. I go there quite often and talk to her and that.**

Mark portrays the patriarchal and harsh gender relations within his wider family and in Episode 4 below, how this past family behaviour is currently a pressure on him, to use violence to solve current issues with his partner. Mark claims that the pressure to act out this violent, masculine identity has come to the fore in relation to the ongoing issue of his partner's lack of contribution to domestic tasks in the home. He describes the battle he is having with this. In the powerful episode below, Mark describes battling family expectations to be violent towards his partner, whilst detailing his own preference to be gentle:

Episode 4

Jane: So do you feel that you're doing it all?

Mark: Yeah I do feel like that but I ain't; she don't do her fair share. She does.

All right sometimes I can force her, I don't know, to do a job, and I've been told I'm too easy on her. If she say's she's not doing it, I'll do it myself. I won't just back chat or pick her up by her hair and say 'do it' like my cousin would.

Because he's been out with her and he's done it. That's where I go wrong you see, if I hear something like, I don't know, she's got raped that would be on my mind, or she got pulled hair, I don't know, it's just it's never where I've been, it's the way I've never been really. All right I am a P** (family name) and the rest of the P**** (family name) treat them like that and I think that's the point.**

Jane: Not your approach?

Mark: No you got to be, the way I play it is gentle, be friendly, all right they're your fiancée but they are your friend as well.

Mark's dilemma seems to be between two versions of masculinity. On the one hand following a family tradition to be violent and on the other his preference for valuing friendship in the relationship. Through his account of these contradictions and choices we gain insight into his described moral relationship with his family and how he is forging a masculine identity, partly through the dilemma of housework. As

Thomson *et al* (2003a) remark:

Theories of individualisation tend to underplay the importance of relationships and forms of reciprocity and obligation that are embedded within them for understanding the identities and practices which individuals engage.

(Thomson *et al* 2003:44)

Daniel and Taylor (2001) argue that practitioners have a vital role to play in influencing masculine behaviour, by working directly with aggressive and abusive men and encouraging them to 'increase their abilities in the expression of emotions, social perception and nurturing' (2001:225). Mark's story indicates a struggle and tension which professional help could assist, particularly as Mark has limited family support (his parents are in Germany), a sick child with a long term disability, as well as having just lost a baby shortly after his birth and another baby on the way. In the interview he portrays the struggle he is having negotiating a path for his identity in the context of this stressful situation. Increased professional awareness and a focus on the complexity of this type of struggle for young fathers may offer a way forward to work with some young men.

6.1.2. Young fathers and their mothers

In the previous section we saw Keith and Mark describe how influential their parents and families were in their lives. To date there is very little literature on the relationship between young men and their mothers and particularly the types of relationships they have when they become fathers. Indeed, in comparison to the literature on the changing relationship between a young woman and her mother following the birth of a child (Oakely 1979; Tabberer *et al* 2000; Allen and Dowling 2000; Reeves 2003) the relationship between a young father and his mother is currently under researched.

The young men in this study were not specifically asked about their mothers and some young men did not mention them at all, instead talking about their parents as a unit. However, many examples of interactions and relationships with mothers did emerge. For example Ben, Paul and Andy described how important their mothers are to them and portray how they have offered them ongoing practical and emotional support, particularly following the birth of their child. Ben, 19, positions his mother as central to his daily life and describes the attachment he has with her: 'Me and my mum have just got that bond together'. She is described by him as helping out with his current baby Charlotte and is involved when social services call and also in preparing Ben and his partner for the birth of their second child. He also describes how he speaks to his mother frequently during the day on the 'phone.

Episode 5

Ben: Mum was on the 'phone to me at the time and like them two was arguing (his mother and father) I went 'where are you?' she went 'up the Country Park, I'm towing your dipstick of a father back' I went 'but you can't tow, you ain't got bar on the back.' She went 'I knew that' I went 'no you don't that's why you phoned up' I went 'you dopey cow'. But like they are always 'phoning us and it's the things like what she comes out with like, when she was here we have this really spicy sauce, I went to her 'here smell this' and she put it up to her ear hole. I went 'what an earth are you doing mother?' I went 'no smell it with your nose not your ear hole!

This episode describes the easy relationship Ben and his mother seem to have and the humour they share. Similarly Paul portrays that he and his mother have always been close and this mutually supportive relationship has continued following the birth of his child. In the episode below we are talking about his relationship with his father and how poor the communication was prior to the birth of his son, this leads Paul, 24, to reflect on the relationship he has with his mother:

Episode 6

Jane: Why do you think that is?

Paul: Erm, because I'm a mummy's boy. My sister is a daddy's girl and the sun always shines out of her backside and she can be a manipulative cow, she always has been, she has always been a daddy's girl and always known that if she wants something she has got it. If she didn't want me to have something I wouldn't get it and she didn't like the fact that my mum and I have got such a close bond. I do things for her at the moment, she is not very well, and I look after her. My sister works two days a week and my mum has her two boys, one of which is at school full time now, but she has them in the afternoon when they finish and she has the little one. And I look after the boys as well.

Paul 'gossips' (Harre and Van Langenhove 1999) about the characters in his family and, like Ben, describes a close 'bond' between himself and his mother. He portrays acknowledging her needs and positions himself offering *her* support and care. Andy, 21, also describes using his mother as part of his network of support as a young father.

In the episode below he describes phoning her when he felt he could not cope with his daughter:

Episode 7

Andy: And the screaming of Sofia and her temper tantrums, even now it gets to me and it really makes me want to strangle her, you know it makes me want to shake her. So I can understand how people have done it. I got to the point where I thought no, this ain't right, this is wrong and I cried because I felt that way and I 'phoned my mum and she said 'yes I felt that with you'. So I 'phoned a few people, so I got to learn to phone a few people to calm down, have a break, walk outside, have a drink.

In this episode we are given an example of a young father utilizing his existing support network at a difficult and stressful time.

6.1.3. Lack of maternal support

Other young fathers claimed that they did not have access to this type of support from their mothers. Six young men, (Jay, Adam, John, Dwayne, Luke and Victor), unlike Andy, Paul and Ben, suggest that the support they had had from their families in the past has been ambivalent and that their mothers, for differing reasons, were not currently involved in their lives. Jay, 19, tells how he moved from his mothers home into lodgings 'to get away from her' as their relationship had broken down.

Following intervention from social services shortly after the birth of his child, his partner and baby were moved away since Jay had stated he would harm his child due to the stress he described feeling from the baby's continual screaming. It is interesting to note that Jay described contacting social services when he felt unable to cope, whilst Andy, in Episode 7, contacted his mother. Jay moved back in with his mother for a short time and in Episode 8 describes how unsupportive he felt she was towards him. Hazel, his partner, is briefly in the room looking for some photographs of their wider family to show me:

Episode 8

Jay: My mum is just vindictive, very. She tries to be the child not you and you have to be the parent and that's not right.

Jane: And how do you feel about that?

Jay: Well how can I feel really, innit. Hazel do you think my mum is vindictive? She tries to be the child, don't she, my mum.

Jane: Right, what kinds of things does she do?

Jay: Well for instance right, well this is a true story this is, just as my girlfriend got taken away from me I had to stay at my mum's house. I was going through a rough time. I was on my depression pills and to be honest I was in no state to be left alone. And my mum took it upon herself and said 'oh I'm going away tonight, I'm going out tonight'. This is what she said when I was at the centre with Hazel and I said 'oh alright I'll see you in a little while when I get to your house' because I was staying at my mum's then, this was a couple of months ago. And she goes. I get back to the flat and I say to Scan 'where's my mum?' and

she's gone to I***** (place name). I said I***** (place name). Now I'm not being funny but I had my first counselling meeting the next day, I was, well I weren't in no state to be left alone, not being rude, I know that I admit that, and she was putting it bluntly, fucked off to I***** (place name). So I made, I know it sounds rude, I made Sean drive up to I***** (place name) and pick up my mum at 3 o'clock in the morning. That's because I was very peed off because she shouldn't be doing that. That's wrong though innit, do you agree?

Jane: Well I mean I don't know your mum, but you felt you needed the support

Jay: And there weren't none there, yeah and that ain't being a mother is it?

In this powerful episode Jay portrays his anger with his mother, at her lack of support when he needed her. He ascribes his mother with malicious behaviour, whilst at the same time explaining his feelings of vindictiveness towards her. He describes making his mother 'pay' for not being emotionally and physically there for him. He twice claims that it was 'not appropriate' for him to be left alone and implies that his mother should have been available for him. Jay suggests that his mother is not living up to his idea of what a mother should be, attentive and concerned with his needs. He consequently gives to her the status of a child which he feels is not right. He wants to carry on being the child (rather like Keith earlier) with a dependent identity and at the centre of her world, despite recently becoming a parent himself, indicating a tension brought about by the competing discourses of fatherhood and youth. Frosh *et al* (2002;237) remark that when 'there is emotion around, the mother, generally speaking, has to bear it'. Jay describes feeling aggrieved that his mother was not sharing his emotion and difficulties with him.

In addition, his story about his mother correlates with wider feminist discourses in social work explored previously in Chapter Two, that women and mothers are held to be 'responsible' for their own lives, as well as 'their children, their partners and dependent parents' (Cavanagh and Cree 1996:3). Women are often positioned as concerned carers when they may not feel like this at all. It is interesting to note that in Episode 8 Jay asks me to collude with the negative definition and positioning of his mother. I decline to do this and I deflect it back onto him, perhaps influenced by my own understanding of how difficult and demanding teenagers can be. Through the positioning of his mother he is calling for attention and support, which, in his eyes she does not return. This critical relationship missing from his life. He conveys, short and to the point, the anger he feels about this 'The parents, I bloody hate them, not being rude, not Hazel's mum, but my mum.'

Apter (1990) remarks that young women often feel the need for their mothers throughout their lives, looking to them for validation, recognition and meaning:

Daughters work deliberately upon their mothers to get recognition and acknowledgement of the newly forming adult self...the child is looking to the parent to see the meaning of what she herself is doing. She finds in that mirror of the mother's face either pleasure or anxiety.

(Apter 1990:19)

Apter further remarks that 'the adolescent daughter needs her mother; it is a lifelong dialogue' (1990:218). Many of the studies reviewed in Chapter One highlighted the importance to young mothers of their own mother (Hudson and Ineichen 1991;

Tabberer *et al* 2000). Although presented differently, Jay's story highlights that some young men may feel this as well especially when they become young fathers.

Other young men in the study described the fractured relationships they have with their mothers. John, 17, expresses below how he and his two brothers were 'moved from pillar to post' in the care system, experiencing foster as well as residential care. He describes how his biological father was absent and that his mother chose violent, abusive partners who were in and out of prison. He has no ongoing contact with his mother and describes the rejection he felt and his lack of understanding of it. I ask him about the kind of professional help he received to help him deal with his feelings for his mother:

Episode 9

John: Where I was so young, I was like, 'why don't my mum want me?' and they couldn't give me the answer, obviously so-

Jane: OK, so why do you think your mum didn't want you? What have you sorted that out for yourself?

John: She obviously didn't want kids, did she? She couldn't look after them and like I said 'why have them?'

Jane: So you didn't think the social workers were giving you the right answers, the answers that you wanted? Did you like them as people?

John: I liked them as people, yeah, they were like enthusiastic, great, but just couldn't give me the right answers when I wanted them because of I was like young.

Although this extract is brief, John frames the story about his mother in a way that does not single out the specific rejection of him, but that she did not want 'them,' her children. He believes that she could not cope with children generally, including his brothers, rather than him explicitly.

Dwayne, Victor and Luke also tell how their relationships with their mothers have broken down and how they are still fractured. Dwayne describes how his mother's new partner caused a rift, with the violence between him and his step-father causing Dwayne to leave the family home. This links with the research of Jones (1995) mentioned earlier, that often a precipitating factor in young men leaving home is violence and conflict with a step parent. Dwayne, 17, explains how his mother's new partner was a 'bit attitudy':

Episode 10

Jane: How do you mean?

Dwayne: Just kept on giving me the moan.

Jane: Right. How did you react to that?

Dwayne: Well I hit him. I used to hit him, beat him up and that.

Jane: You did?

Dwayne: Yeah, he used to beat my brother up, my little brother, he's seven. He just used to like smack him and that, but I think that's out of order, so I just used to beat him up all of the time.

Jane: How did that go down with your mum?

Dwayne: I think she got the hump with me coz I kept on like punching him and that every time.

Jane: And what did he used to say to you?

Dwayne: Nothing he just used to walk out of the house.

Jane: What was the reason you left home? Tell me why you left home?

Dwayne: My mum got a divorce from my brother's and sister's dad and then she got another partner and then I moved out of that house coz he threatened to beat me up and took me up the woods and that. Threatened to beat me up, so I just moved out after that.

Jane: Why did he do that?

Dwayne: My brother nicked something out of the house and he blamed it all on me.

Jane: So how have you got on with your mum through all this?

Dwayne: All right, I don't see her much no more.

Dimmock (2004) points out that young people in step-families are likely to leave home earlier than those who live with their biological families. He also indicates a link between leaving home early and the experience of young parenthood. An important factor in leaving the family home would seem to be the position taken by the mother. For example, Dwayne positions himself as being isolated in his conflict with his step-father, moving away from the dominant discourse of mothers being 'more sensitive, better at communication, calmer and more patient' (Daniel and Taylor 2001:4). It would appear from his description that Dwayne's mother did not, or could not, intervene on his side. Step-parents can therefore distance the relationship between mothers and sons which, in turn, can impact upon the type of

support mothers provide to them as young fathers. Frosh *et al* (2002) remark that young men often turn to their mothers for emotional support. If this support has been removed, young fathers are missing a valuable form of emotional backing and encouragement at a crucial time in their lives.

Victor, 16, in a short extract, also describes his mother's lack of involvement in his life. Now in prison, she is no longer described as being a part of his life or support network:

Episode 11

Victor: My mum walked out on us two weeks before last Christmas, not just gone, the other one. And she was a heroin addict and my brother left before and went to live with my aunty. Then me and my sister left and I was living with my Nan for a little while and my sister was living with her ex-boyfriend's mum.

Despite this distance from his mum he tells how he wants to keep her involved in his life by sending her a picture of the scan of the baby; 'I'm going to get my mum from prison one'. Adam, 16, waiting to be sentenced at magistrates' court, excuses the lack of support from his mother by constructing the context of the court as not being a suitable place for women. I ask if his partner or mother has been to visit him:

Episode 12

Adam: No she hasn't, well I won't let her. In practice it's not the place for my family to be I won't even let my mum come and visit, just not the place for them to be.

Jane: Has your mum been here today?

Adam: No she hasn't and I wouldn't expect her to either, not letting her see me go down again.

Luke, 15, tells of rejection by his mother and how now, living with his father, he has very little contact with her:

Episode 13

Jane: So how did you get to be back at home with your dad?

Luke: Well when I was in foster care my mum took me back out again, she put me into it and back out. Then my mum kicked me out when I was eleven, twelve, twelve, yeah. My dad was on holiday so I lived with my friends for a little while. When he came back he took me in.

Jane: Your dad did?

Luke: Yeah he took me back in because he didn't know me did he? Because my mum and all that, and I was living with my mum I never met me dad because I was brought up to hate my dad or something, something like that any way.

The fractured situation between him and his mother he attributes to the negative behaviour of his two brothers. It is interesting to note that he does not elaborate on

what he means by 'proper rebels' especially in the light of his own anti-social behaviour.

Episode 14

Luke: She said to me that she only put me in foster care because she wanted my two brothers Jon and Dez to go, because they were getting too much for her, because they were proper rebels, but she didn't mean for me to go an all, but they took me an' all. That's what she said anyway.

Luke relates that he does not have any ongoing contact with his mother, however, as with Dwayne, the breakdown in the relationship with his mother seems to have encouraged the relationship with his father to flourish. His dad is positioned positively:

Episode 15

Luke: My dad's cushty²

Jane: What's good about him?

Luke: Everything, he- I don't know, he does things for me all the time, buys me things all the time, he don't have to come and let me work with him and all that.

The young men's relationships with their fathers are the focus of the next section.

² A slang term commonly understood to mean 'good'.

6.2. Proximity and distance: young men and their fathers

Coleman and Hendry (2004) argue that fathers are crucial to the long term development of their children and seen as being important in:

..setting long term goals, in determining rules and providing discipline and in acting as role models. However, they do not get to know their teenagers as individual personalities or support them in their emotional progress through adolescence.

(Coleman and Hendry 2004:85)

Not all of the young men in this study mentioned their fathers. Where they were talked about, however, there was a combination of differing circumstances. Often they were described as having left the family home when the participant was a young child and subsequently being replaced by a step-parent or a father is described as having played a fuller part in the young man's life. In the episodes below the three young men mentioned in the previous section as having poor relationships with their mothers, Luke, Dwayne and Daniel, describe their fathers re-appearing in their lives, offering renewed forms of support and responding to the new circumstances in their sons' lives. Other young men, for example Paul, Andy and Ben, suggest that their fathers have always been physically present in their lives, but they report a subtle change in their relationship with them following the pregnancy or birth of their child. The section starts with an analysis of these ongoing, re-negotiated relationships.

6.2.1. Fathers and sons: re-negotiating ongoing relationships

Some of the young men described how becoming a father themselves has subtly changed the dynamics of their relationship. Paul, Manuel and Andy describe their fathers as 'strict' and 'traditional' but not as punishing them physically in the past. Instead punishment took the form of them being grounded. Paul, 24, claims that his relationship with his father has never been as close although he describes the arrival of Alex, his child, as improving the relationship:

Episode 16

Jane: How would you describe your relationship with your dad?

Paul: It's since Alex has moved in it has got a lot better (laughs). Erm..never been able to talk to dad, never been able to hold a conversation with dad, we don't talk. The communication between me and my dad is not very good.

Jane: Why? Why do you think that is?

Paul : Erm because I'm a mummy's boy [.....] I do things for her, at the moment she's not very well and I look after her [.....] But between me and dad it's getting better, we can kind of talk, but we don't. I don't know why, I don't think..dad has never been one for playing football with me or...that is why me and mum work together, always read or done stuff together. Dad is always..dad is quite traditional, he always works for a living and my mother has never really been at work. She has had a few odd jobs but my dad always says 'you don't really need to' dad has always supported the family. He's quite traditionalist in a way. He thinks it is quite odd for me to have Alex in my care, and at the moment I am trying to get my training done for childcare

Paul positions his father as a 'character' in his life but he describes him as someone who does not have the same interests or outlook on life. Paul is currently providing fulltime care for his son and trying to get training in childcare, which is a major difference in employment choice and a direct contrast to the role taken by his own father, who is portrayed as distant with fixed 'traditional' beliefs about working and providing. Alex, Paul's son, is now living with his father and grandfather and Alex is situated as a vehicle for change in the relationships between father and son. Manuel, 22, is more overt in his description of the changing relationship with his father. Like Paul he also describes how important work was to his father:

Episode 17

Manuel: He used to go to work at about 6-7 am and if I was lucky he would get home at about 8pm. So I didn't see him in the morning and didn't see him at night, because I was always asleep when he got in.

Jane: So how do you think that affected you?

Manuel: Erm it kind of affected me in the way where you would see all the other kids with their dads, playing with the ball and things like that. I never did that with my dad. The only time he was involved was a big fuss about who I was to play with. But now he is a lot different.

Jane: Now he is different?

Manuel: Yes, being a lot older, yes I can see it from his point of view now, he's not a very kiddie person. Erm I get on better with him now.

Jane: Do you?

Manuel: Yes, when I see him I can have a laugh and joke with him. Occasionally we might go out for a meal with them, but certainly not very often.

Jane: Yes OK.

Manuel: So now we get on a lot better erm things like the car and that if it goes wrong, but that's about it really

Jane: Why do you think it has improved? Do you think there are a number of reasons or-?

Manuel: I have grown up. I am not so childish any more.

Jane: So you think you have changed, rather than...him?

Manuel: Yes I think I have changed more than him, when you are a kid you don't take notice. When somebody tells you one thing you go and do the opposite.

Jane: Why is that? (laughs)

Manuel: I don't know. As I say, it is a lot different.

Work is placed as an important feature for both Paul and Manuel's fathers, defining their past roles, with both young men attributing their fathers' preoccupation with work as being responsible for the lack of involvement in their own young lives. In contrast, neither Manuel nor Paul currently work and they describe being intimately involved in their children's daily lives. Both young men claim that their own fathers did not play football with them or demonstrate a direct interest in their lives as children. Frosh *et al* (2001) suggest that 'football is a defining feature of masculine cultures in Britain' (2001:235) and was cited as having an important place in the recollections of the relationships between a significant number of young men and their fathers. Manuel claims that he is the one who has moved in position and

perspective towards his father as he has grown older and become a father himself.

Andy, 21, also portrays how his father has changed and that by becoming a grandparent his father acts in a different way, enabling Andy to see a different side, one he does not recollect seeing as a child. He describes his father's new status as a grandfather:

Episode 18

Andy: He's never been a child person, holding babies, you know. My aunt has had babies since, you know she has had two others and he's never actually held them, but with Sophia he was really in to it and I was quite surprised. I mean even now he's like 'where's my granddaughter?' and he comes in and picks her up and talks to her. Me mum just goes nuts; you know and goes 'Where's my turn? Wait for me.'

Jane: So what kind of dad was he with you then?

Andy: A strict one.

Jane: A strict one?

Andy: Not as strict as he would've liked to have been I suppose. But I never got hit, I never got belted or anything like that, but he was quite strict in punishment like grounding and stuff like that. But I still did get away with blue murder.

Jane: Was he a cuddly dad then?

Andy: Not really, he wasn't really a cuddly dad. I mean he was really standoffish about this baby that I lost. Nobody told him the name and he found out and saw a picture of her. This is the picture that I had out of my wallet that

day. We went down to the club and was drinking and drinking and drinking...then he went back down and saw the picture and he cried.

Jane: So he showed his emotion?

Andy: Yeah, the first time.

Alcohol is viewed as a resource which has enabled Andy and his father open up and show emotion to each other.

6.2.2. Re-appearing fathers

My previous research described how, for some young mothers, becoming pregnant and having a baby acts as a healing factor in the relationship between a young woman and her mother (Reeves 2003). Similarly, as outlined above, for some young men in this study the prospect or birth of the child is described by them as a contributing factor in re-positioning their relationship with their father. Luke, Dwayne and Daniel describe how their changing circumstances and needs, directly related to them becoming fathers, have been significant factors in re-establishing contact between father and son with offers of new forms of support. These three young men claim that they did not live with their fathers when they were growing up and, indeed, Luke and Dwayne describe having completely lost contact. They now portray current involvement with their fathers. Daniel, 18, explains how, just prior to the birth of his child, he went to live with his father and his new wife due to lack of space at his mother's home. Daniel tells how he turned for support to his father when he had to meet with his partner's family about the impending pregnancy; 'me and me dad went round there to tell them'. Like Luke and Dwayne, Daniel is now living and working

with his father. Luke also describes his renewed relationship with his father (after growing up apart from him) as altering the social fabric of his life. Luke portrays himself at the time of the interview as sharing not only his father's social life and support networks, but also his work environment. A clear example of a re-emerging critical relationship. I ask Luke, 15, who is the most important adult in his life:

Episode 19

Luke: Be my dad ain't it.

Jane: Do you want to be the same kind of dad as your dad?

Luke: Yeah, I want to be the same.

Jane: Why? What does he do that's good as a dad? I know you say he buys you things but how good is he as a dad?

Luke: He is, he's like, he takes you places when you want to be took and all that. Say you're in a pub or something, he's got loads and loads of friends and all that, proper respected around S*** (place) and all that, loads of friends and all that; he's a cushty lad.**

Luke appears to have a high regard for two aspects of his father's character: his large group of friends and the respect that he has in the local community. This has a currency which Luke admires. Although in the previous Chapter Luke described his girlfriend as rescuing him from his criminal and anti-social behaviour, it would appear that Luke's father has also played a part in the rescue operation, by providing him with a framework to reinvent and act out a new responsible identity. Dwayne, 17, tells

a similar story of an absent father who left his life when his parents divorced. Like Luke and Daniel, his father is described as reappearing at a time in his life when there is a lack of other support (he has fallen out with his mother and step-father). I ask him if he is currently working:

Episode 20

Dwayne: Bricklaying with my dad's brother.

Jane: Is that your real dad or your step dad?

Dwayne: Yeah my real dad.

Jane: So are you seeing your real dad now then?

Dwayne: Well sometimes I see him, but he like rings me up and that all the time, but I don't really see him, but he rang me up Tuesday or Wednesday and offered me a job working with my uncle. I went 'all right then'. He said 'you start on Monday'. I went 'alright then'.

Jane: Why do you think he did that?

Dwayne: I don't know. He wants to see me settle down and that, he don't want me in court no more. I've been in court for ages, like two years and that, all the time. He just wants me to keep out of trouble and that and he says he's got me a job.

Jane: Is that how you feel about it?

Dwayne: Yeah, like doing things will keep me out of trouble in case I get bored and that, led astray again.

Dwayne does not initially appear as 'forgiving' and warm to his father as Luke and Daniel. However, it can be argued that in the latter part of the episode, Dwayne's identity is changing, moving towards the kind of person others want him to be through the intervention of his father. Like Luke, Dwayne describes his father as reappearing in his life when he had little other positive family support, and offering him a job. Again it can be suggested that this is another component of a wider 'rescue' jigsaw, with the son responding to his father's contact and offers of practical support. It is interesting to note that these three young men do not describe the reconciliation with their fathers in emotional terms, but rather couch their renewed presence in their lives in terms of practical support.

6.2.3. 'I don't like the way he is' (Shaun age 19): ongoing poor father/son relationships

Where a young father does not describe having a positive relationship with his partner or the ongoing support of a parental figure, the outlook can be somewhat bleak. Adam, Shaun and John, describe the continuing bitterness and dislike they have towards their fathers, primarily caused by the hurt they describe as being inflicted on them in the past. It also appears that, for these three young men, their fathers are not described as making efforts to re-enter their lives.

Adam, 16, describes an ongoing negative relationship with his biological father which has been acted out in a public arena. Adam is the son of a senior policeman and in the interview he describes the pain and hurt that his distant relationship with his father

causes him. Adam has been in custody three previous times for driving offences. I ask him why he keeps offending, particularly with cars:

Episode 21

Adam: Because-I don't know, I've got problems with my dad that this police officer's sorting out and I don't know, it might just be attention seeking, I don't know. I couldn't give you an honest answer. I don't speak to my dad, I wish I did. I wish, like a lot of people, I had a normal relationship, a bonding relationship, but I just don't have it no more, so it's just on my mum.

Jane: So how long haven't you spoken to him for?

Adam: About two years, he split up from my mum when I was eleven, gone bad ever since. My dad started beating up my mum and they got divorced and mum remarried.

Adam describes one possible motivation for his offending behaviour, namely to gain the attention of his father, and also having to separate from him.

Episode 22

Adam: It was a bit heartbreaking when I had to go home and I knew my dad weren't going to come home with me. As I say there was a lot of heartache and pain then and there still is, but I can't change the past. He's embarrassed I know that much.

Jane: Is he local?

Adam: Yeah I nearly lost him his job: he had to chase me at high speed too.

Jane: So you must feel a bit upset about that?

Adam: Yeah I can't really talk about it, I actually try not to think about it because it makes me upset.

Jane: OK, sorry.

In the episodes above Adam intimates wanting to move towards his father, however, alone in a police cell neither his father nor mother are there to hear this.

The transition experiences described in Chapter Five indicated how other young men in this research engaged in the type of reckless behaviour described by Adam, for example, Manuel describing driving at 80 mph in stolen cars. However, the young men discussed in Chapter Five situate others as ultimately coming to their rescue, supporting them and in due course helping them to change their behaviour and identities. Luke, Dwayne and Daniel tell of a partner who became involved in their lives and in addition describe how their fathers, previously distant figures in their lives, re-established contact at a crucial time. Adam, however, has a fractious and sometimes violent relationship with the mother of his child, and does not tell his story in terms of being rescued by her or anyone else in his immediate family, including his father. Adam tells a regressive, pessimistic story which desperately needs the intervention of other characters. Analysis of Adam's narrative and the positioning of his father supports the commentary provided by Frosh *et al* (2002) regarding the effects that parental involvement can have for the availability of identity positions:

Whilst the foundational relationships in young childhood may be especially significant in laying down the expectations and unconscious structures out of which

people's identities emerge, there is little doubt that that the quality of continuing relationships is of major importance for psychological and social well being. In terms of the experiences of young men, this suggests that the way they relate to their parents will be a crucial factor in determining the degree to which they feel supported and encouraged as they explore the various identity positions available to them.

(Frosh *et al* 2002:22).

Adam's story details the spasmodic involvement he had with his father until two years ago and how his father's rejection of him seems to have coincided with the height of Adam's offending. Adam's narrative suggests that if he had a re-establishment of interest and support in his life from his father (like Luke, Dwayne and Daniel) the involvement could be significant. At this time Adam appears limited in the options and support mechanisms currently available to him. Connell (2000) argues that:

Adult masculinities are produced through a complex process of growth and development involving active negotiation in multiple social relationships.

(Connell 2000:31)

Adam appears to have limited options and does not appear to be engaging with external family relationships or being validated by others (Gergen 1994) in a way that is meaningful to him.

John, 17, describes wanting to distance himself from his real father following being abused as a child but, following a prompt from me expresses how his father's behaviour has acted as a negative role model to him. He suggests, however, that there

have been other more positive male role models he can draw on in his future role as a father:

Episode 23

Jane: So how do you see yourself then being a dad? What do you think, you know?

John: I don't think I'm anything like my old man because I would never harm - my dad used to beat us when we were kids. So, I know I've got to be the opposite to him haven't I? Really caring for my kids as much as I can.

Jane: Is there anybody in care, any of the foster dads that you look up towards?

John: Yeah, Geoff's father I did. That's like my boss's fiancé.

Jane: Anyway what is good about him?

John: He was just kind. He'd have his snappy moments at me, but that's like any person, but he was just so kind. When I went there he give me like a fishing rod, just for like a welcome gift and he used to take me fishing and give me like that pound extra pocket money, because of like my background and he'd say, coz I was proper scared of men for years.

Jane: Scared of men?

John: Yeah because of what my dad used to do, used to beat me, and he was just, he weren't trying to buy my love, but he was saying 'listen not every male is like that' and like one year everyone wanted computers and I said I wanted a dog and he bought me a dog. I couldn't believe it, a Springer spaniel he bought me.

John distances his behaviour from his father's by stating that he wants to be the 'opposite' describing a different discourse on fatherhood. In Episode 23 John also portrays how scared generally he was of men and how he values the kindness shown to him by his foster father. In social work with vulnerable parents it is easy to look in the short term, at the negative breakdown of placements, particularly for 'hard to place' teenagers. However, as John's story illustrates, over a period of time young people can make positive connections and take forward these models as a resource to use in the future.

Shaun, 19, also describes distancing himself from his father due to past violence. He situates himself the active agent, encouraging his parents to split up because of the violence between them:

Episode 24

Jane: OK, where did you live?

Shaun: Well we did live with my dad but there was some violence there between him and my mum, my mum and him, so I asked my mum to leave him and we stayed with my aunt until I think I was about five or six and then my mum met my step dad and they've been together ever since then.

Jane: How do you feel about your mum and dad splitting up and stuff?

Shaun: Well I don't get on with him still.

Jane: You don't, not even now.

Shaun: Because I don't like the way he is.

Jane: How is he then, what's he like?

Shaun: When he's had a drink, like he tends to get violent...so I just don't like him, because we've had a fight out the front there.

Shaun's story echoes that of John, describing his dislike of his father's alcohol induced violence.

6.3. Negotiating new forms of support

The pregnancy and birth are constructed by some of the young men as encouraging them to negotiate new supportive and critical relationships. Specifically, Shaun, Manuel, Dwayne, Victor, Jay and Luke describe how, at the time of the interview, they were engaged in the process of forming positive relationships with their partner's parents and making investments for the future in new social networks. Manuel describes how he and his partner Kelly see her parents 'every day' and how he has invested his feelings in the relationships with them how the relationship is mutually supportive. He places Kelly's parents in a position of high regard, expressing his love for them ' I love them to pieces, they are like my own parents, they are great, they really are.' He also mentions their poor health, but not as impacting negatively on his life. Manuel is a young father in poor health himself with emphysema, however, he describes his daily contact with two, quite ill parents and the feeling is one of mutual support and kindness, rather than seeing them as a further burden to his own life.

Dwayne, 17, describes living with his partner's grandmother who is portrayed as taking him in when his step-father 'threw him out'. He relates his affection for her and describes how she looks after him:

Episode 25

Dwayne: Her Nan gets some kind of money for me staying there, but like she like goes out and buys some clothes every week and that. Buys me like tracksuit bottoms, baggy shirt and like a jumper every week, or like every other week, something like that.

Dwayne portrays his girlfriend's grandmother as adopting a parental role with him, shopping, providing materially for him and putting a roof over his head.

Victor and Jay describe their investment in their partner's families and how hard this has been for them. For Victor, 16, lacking in parental support of his own, locating himself within his partner's family appears tricky, but necessary. He tells me how his partner's parents found out about the pregnancy:

Episode 26

Victor: He came in to the room and said 'are you going to tell me the good news?' and she didn't say anything, but we thought he might have known because he, Sharron went 'I'm getting fat ain't I?' and he went 'yeah in one place'. He walked in to the bathroom and she was being sick and said

'everything's going to be OK' so that's why we thought he knew, but I might be wrong, don't know yet. He doesn't seem like he's all mad and that.

Jane: He doesn't?

Victor: No when Sharron's sister fell pregnant she told her dad and Nick, Theresa's boyfriend at the time, he got barred from the house for eight months and he was always round there, it's like he weren't round there for eight months.

Jane: Right, so how do you get on with her mum and dad?

Victor: Sharron tells me that they think I'm the best boyfriend she's ever had, they think that I'm really smart and everything like that, quite an intelligent young lad, polite and that.

Jane: That's nice.

Victor: Yeah I get on with her dad, I really like him and every time I go down there, he's always got something new to teach me.

Jane: Right, so what do you say?

Victor: He's always got something new to teach me.

Jane: About what?

Victor: Everything, like yesterday he was talking about how fast the world travels, how far away the sun is, it's something like seventy three million miles away.

Research reviewed in Chapter One detailed how the maternal grandparent often acts as a gatekeeper between the young father, the mother and the baby (Gavin *et al* 2002). Some of the young fathers' narratives in this study tell of other gate keeping relationships, particularly where the young mother has a fairly positive relationship with her parents. Victor, in the episode above, appears to be taking the line of least

resistance. Sharron's father has not forced or confronted the issue of the pregnancy and Victor is doing the same. They appear to be tiptoeing round the subject trying to establish a relationship with one another. In addition, as in Luke's situation, Victor's girlfriend is presented as acting as a broker between her parents and her boyfriend, relaying his positive characteristics. Victor indicates he is making an investment in the relationship with her father, by maintaining that he likes him and also by placing him in the role of a mentor with himself in the role of the eager pupil. Thus, rather than acting the pregnancy scenario out as a conflict (as in the case of Daniel), Victor curries favour with his partner's father, acknowledging his role as a teacher. Despite Victor's stories of past offending, fighting and being able to 'stick up' for himself, he does not want to continue this identity with the grandfather of his child. This is a similar situation to that of Luke who conceals his more extreme delinquent attributes and tells how he tries to be polite to his partner's parents.

There would therefore seem to be a process of re-negotiation for all parties following a pregnancy at a young age, not just between a young mother and her own mother (Tabberer *et al* 2000) or the young father and her mother (Gavin *et al* 2002) but also between the young father and his partner's father. The process can often be highly emotional but one which needs to be navigated carefully by all parties involved. Acknowledging this as a potential hurdle to young fathers and encouraging them or focussing on increasing their communication skills to traverse these new situations could be a positive step in working with young fathers.

6.3.1. Strains in these new support networks

Jay's story mentioned earlier exemplifies the complex family situations in which many young fathers find themselves. As previously stated, in order to protect his baby and avoid immediate care proceedings, Jay's partner and baby were required to live with her parents, a situation which was complicated by the fact that she had previously recently left the family home. Jay, 19, has contact with his child through supervised access at the local social services family centre. He describes himself as being in the awkward state of being dependent upon his partner's parents, whom he has only just met, to help care for a child he cannot cope with but at the same time, like Luke and Victor, trying to negotiate a relationship with them in his own right. Initially he describes his partner's mother as a 'lovely lady'. I ask him about his family and he maintains:

Episode 27

Jay: I got, mostly I just rely on my girlfriend, you know, I don't have no contact with my mum. I find Hazel, as well as, I don't get on with her parents I find they've been very supportive even though I don't get on with Hazel's parents.

I ask how his partner's parents reacted to the news of the pregnancy:

Jay: Hazel wasn't in contact with her parents until social services told her we can either take her away or go and stay with your parents, so that's how they got reunited and they didn't see Kieran until he was about two months old.

Jane: So did they know he was on the way?

Jay: Yeah social services rang up, but they accepted him which was very

respectful, they've sort of accepted me which-

Jane: What do you mean 'sort of?'

Jay: Well it's hard, its very weird grounds like, they don't know me from Adam to Eve. I'm with their daughter and we've got a baby. Last they knew their girlfriend, their daughter I mean was seventeen years old and living in a hostel, now she's eighteen , got a new born baby. So it's very hard to get to know them, her dad, John, he's a lovely man, very blunt which I like in a person.

Jane: Yeah you know where you stand with him.

Jay: Yeah, yeah her dad you do, yeah, her mum, her mum well she, it's like, it's like she's, I'm not saying she's two faced, you know.

Jane: This is your mum?

Jay: No Hazel's mum. She won't lie about me or nothing but my point is, if for instance I do something she disagrees with, like I held my baby once in her house like because I used to visit their house and I was winding him and everything. It was a bit weird, she went to me 'oh you don't do it like this' and she took him off me and just turned him around and put him on his belly. Now it's nothing to me but at the time she had no place to tell me that, but her mum is a nice lady and she's helped us out. I can't diss⁴ the fact that she gave us those frames there, them picture frames, them two and her dad took all them photos except that one, paid thirty quid for that one. I got that one free down Alders. Yeah they are nice people, they've given us cups and helped us out. Table mats and blah, blah, blah. It's the little things that help though innit? It's the little things that help.

⁴ A slang term generally agreed to me 'disrespect'.

Jay's dilemma is apparent in Episode 27. His description portrays his indecisiveness about his partner's parents primarily focussed on the imbalance of power between them. On the one hand he appears greatly relieved that they seem to have accepted him and are offering his new family emotional and practical support, although he mentions they are hard to get to know. On the other hand, Jay admits that he does not like being told what to do, especially regarding the care of his own child. However, Jay acknowledges he is not the person who holds power in this situation. Due to his stated inability to cope with his child he is in the uncomfortable 'forced' position (Harre and Van Langenhove 1999), initiated by social services, of having to comply with their arrangements and this includes the involvement of his partner's parents in the care and protection of the baby. He also describes the different social class of Hazel's parents and how difficult he perceives the negotiations between them:

Episode 28

Jane: So how important is being a dad to you then, Jay?

Jay: Very important ain't it, my appearance, what I used to think a lot was because Hazel's parents are very rich well, I wouldn't say rich but they got a nice bit of money, a nice house bought their own house blah, blah, blah. I used to think when I knock on their door, they look down at me but on a couple of occasions I was complimented by Hazel's mum: 'Oh you are very respectful, blah, blah, blah you're a good person, I'm sorry for all the grief'. On a couple of occasions she said that so I think my first appearance is well, from my look, I look like a yobbo, any young one does nowadays, not being rude but I think give me the time of day, thirty-five minutes to talk to you, see what kind of person I

am. And I think that any person that does that will see that I'm a decent person, because I am, and it is very important so you're a decent person because that's all there is in life innit.

Jay states that there has been 'grief' between him and them but seems concerned to emphasise the respectful side of his identity, which he feels is at odds with his appearance. In Episode 27 Jay describes needing his partner's parents, recognizing their support and their comparative wealth to him and also his desire to be seen by them as a 'respectful' and 'decent' person. However, he acknowledges the imbalance in power between them and describes finding this challenging and unsettling. In his relationship with Hazel's father he characterises the latter as being 'blunt' but, like Victor, seems to acknowledge the father's gate keeping role between him, his partner and child and as a result has made an investment with him.

6.4. Positive contributors: the ingredients of support offered by the young men to their partners

The previous sections in this chapter have analysed the complexities and subtleties of family relationships and networks of support for the young fathers and some narratives have shown how renewed relationships help them shape and validate new identity positions. We have also seen that constructions of relationships within families have long term consequences for young fathers. Some of the stories have also described how young fathers negotiate tricky new relationships and align themselves with differing gatekeepers.

Also of relevance in this study is how the young men position themselves in relation to fatherhood. As shown by the literature reviewed in Chapter One, a father's active involvement with their child is associated with positive outcomes for both the child and the family unit (O'Brien 2003). All of the young fathers in this study, with the exception of Adam who was in youth custody, said that they were involved with the child and the child's mother on a daily basis, even if they were not currently living with them. Moreover, a significant majority of the young men were not in paid work, so had the opportunity to be involved in the day-to-day care of their child. Indeed individual stories detail the high levels of support some of the young men describe providing to their children and partners and all of them, despite acknowledging difficulties and tensions, speak positively and lovingly about their children (see for example Andy's account of the birth of his daughter in Chapter Four)

This section begins by looking at the reflections of some of the young fathers who are currently living with their partners and children. Shane, Jay, Sid, John, Peter, Dwayne, Ben, Manuel, Keith, Mark, Andy and Paul all describe their involvement with their children including bathing, changing nappies, getting up in the night and dressing their children. Adam, Luke, Victor, Jay, Shaun and Daniel were, at the time of the interview, not currently living with their children and are not directly considered here as they did not talk in any depth about their involvement, although excerpts from Luke and Victor on their impressions of 'virtual' fatherhood have been considered in Chapter Five. Moreover, at the time of the interview Adam had only been a father for one day and was in custody. The section will then move on to consider other issues of support, including reflections on identified boundaries or obstacles to providing care for their child. Finally, in this section are the narratives of

Mark, Andy and Paul concerning gender conflicts with their partners regarding boundaries of support.

6.4.1. Young fathers who live with their children: adopting a caring role

During the interview with Keith, 19, I asked what kind of father he was:

Episode 29

Keith: I'm a good dad.

Jane: What kinds of things do you do?

Keith: Everything really, bath her, change her, get her dressed in the morning because I get up to her at night because my girlfriend relaxes in the bed like (snores)

Jane: She what?

Keith: She sleeps, and I get up to her.

Jane: Do you?

Keith: Yeah I get up. I get up during the night and she gets up in the mornings.

Jane: And how many times does she wake up?

Keith: Once. She should wake up about three in the morning. If she don't wake up at three she goes all night, that's it.

Jane: And what kinds of things do you do in the night when you get up?

Keith: Warm her bottle up and give it to her, hopefully she'll go back to sleep if she don't she's there for hours awake, laughing.

Keith identifies that there is such a thing as a 'good' father and includes himself in this category. He describes the ingredients of being a good father as including being involved in his child's physical care and carrying out practical tasks for her. Keith speaks fondly of caring for his daughter, of being involved with her and of sharing the responsibility of looking after her, particularly at night. Andy and Mark tell similar stories about their practical involvement in the care of their children. Andy, 21, remarks how, as a consequence of his visual impairment, he has had to adapt his care, but he also describes the enjoyment he has from just being with his baby daughter:

Episode 30

Jane: Did you have any fixed ideas before you became a dad of how you wanted to be or was it something that just evolved?

Andy: It was something that was thrust upon me if you like. I was just dropped in at the deep end, I was scared to hold her, I was scared to change her bum. I still can't change a poeey nappy, I do it, but I've got to put pegs on my nose and just not look. She brings a lot of joy into mine and my wife's life. She really is funny; she can be a bit spiteful but she's funny when she's doing it.

Jane: So tell me what kinds of things you do as a dad? Tell me how you go about being a dad?

Andy: I help prepare food with my wife. I can't always do it properly, so I have to get my wife to help, but I feed her a bottle, I bathe her, I do her teeth. Angie never gets a chance to push her down the road in the buggy.

Jane: You do?

Andy: I do I love it. Sometimes I can't see where I am going and walk into cars but Angie just goes 'stop, left, right.' It's hard on these days because I have to relinquish the buggy then. It's very rare that she does it. I do push on though not being able to see. I just say 'right hold on my arm and guide me I am pushing'.

Andy tells of the 'joy' that his baby daughter has brought to his life and how he is drawn into her life. It is interesting to note how he expresses his lack of preparation for the fathering role feeling 'dropped in at the deep end' and how keen he is to situate himself as coping. This is perhaps a result of the pressure he feels from his partner having previously had five children, all of whom have been taken into care and adopted. Mark, 18, also describes himself as being the full time carer of his severely disabled son and being intimately involved in his routine:

Episode 31

Jane: What time do you get up?

Mark: Depends on JT really, yeah depends. Say I put him down at, say about eight o'clock at night, I have to. Well I bathe him every night and sometimes in the morning, depends how he feels, because sometimes he is grumpy. I put him in the bath to cool him down. Yeah get him out, give him his breakfast; it's cornflakes with warm water and a little bit of milk and a little bit of sugar and that's how he wants it. Give him that.

Mark describes the intimate knowledge he has of his son's needs and how he is involved with all aspects of his physical care.

6.4.2. The night shift

For some the young fathers in this study night time seems to be a key time for their involvement. Manuel echoes Keith's involvement and tells how he gets up during the night:

Episode 32

Jane: Do you share the childcare, or is it mainly Kelly or is it mainly you?

Manuel: Erm at the beginning Kelly looked after Robert, then she was getting sick and couldn't wake up at night for the feeding times. After about three months I got used to it in the end, getting up at night for the feed, that sort of thing. Now I get up at night and get them if they wake up.

Dwayne, 17, replying to my question about how he is involved with the baby, also points out his night time participation:

Episode 33

Dwayne: Got a bit sleepless nights and that, but it's all right now, it's all settled down.

Jane: How did you cope with the sleepless nights?

Dwayne: Well I used to like, look after my little sister all the time anyway. Just fed my little sister at nights so it don't bother me, I stay up until about four or five in the morning anyway.

It is interesting to note that Dwayne claims he has already been involved in a caring capacity in his previous family life, looking after and caring for his baby sister. This is a position also described by Adam, 16, who although not currently involved with his baby daughter as he is in prison, also describes a past caring role also with his sister.

Episode 34

Adam: I don't mind a bit of poo and a bit of sick or whatever.

Jane: You've done it before?

Adam: Yeah with my little sister. My sister had whooping cough and I managed to deal with that. I was by myself by the side of her and she was at the toilet. I got used to that, I don't know I've just cleaned up the shit and poo and everything.

Although these are only two examples, this portrayal by young men of their involvement in families could point to an underestimation in the amount of young men who do act in caring capacities within families and could point to an area which needs further study.

Dwayne, John, Keith, Peter, Manuel, Andy, Mark, and Paul all describe their involvement with their children during the night. It is interesting to note that at the time of the interview none of these young men were working. Manuel, who does not work due to his long term physical disability also talks about his shared involvement in caring for his children during the day when 'we take it in turns, then take them up to their playroom, one of us goes up and the other one has a break'.

Keith describes the day and night time shifts differently. Day time is talked about in terms of his partner having the main responsibility for the child with him being called upon to help out when she needs support, whilst during the night he gets up and cares for the child. I ask what kinds of things his partner does for the baby: 'Everything really, same things as I do because I'm out there working on my car, she'll do what Shelly needs, but if she needs a hand she'll call me out the window to give her a help. I will help her.'

Keith's involvement with his child at night is situated as being independent from his partner, however, the responsibility for defining the type of help that is required during the day is portrayed as resting with the mother. In Manuel's case, although he describes the child care as being undertaken fairly equally, it is telling that when describing his day he maintains that when the children are at school 'it allows me and Kelly to do what she wants to do'; although not a remark about being a father it gives insight of the perceived power dynamics in Manuel's relationship with him undertaking activities which are led by his partner. In the episode below, Peter, 24, also describes how he undertakes the night shift:

Episode 35

Peter: He normally wakes up at 7am, give or take half an hour. She will come down and give him his bottle, I stay up stairs and give him his bottle.

Jane: (laughs) That sounds nice and fair doesn't it?

Peter: Oh it's fair, don't get me wrong, it's definitely fair. Because what happens is, she will go to bed about 9 or 10pm depending when he wants to go. Then I will stay up until about 3am, waiting for him to wake up for his 3am feed, give him his bottle, settle him down again while she is sleeping, I hope. And then I do that bit and she wakes up and does the next bit.

Being able to sleep during the day or to get up late enables some young men to participate as fathers in different ways to their own fathers, some of whom were described as working long hours and not being closely involved in their lives. I ask Paul, 24, how he would describe his involvement with his son:

Episode 36

Paul: I have gone from being. I have always been very happy with Alex, but I have gone from being a full time dad that has time off to go to work, or when we were together I had time away from Alex, to having Alex 24/7. I don't get no help. When we split up it was always that arranged that Lisa would have a couple of nights a week where she would come and stay with me at my mum's. so she had a couple of nights off. But for eighteen weeks I haven't had a night off. I had the occasion where somebody would baby-sit so I could go out, or the days where Lisa takes him out for the day and I have the day. It is all the time, I

have not had, what you call a night's sleep. Because when we first did Alex was in a strange house, he couldn't sleep in his own bed, it got to the stage where he would sleep in his own bed and then sometimes in the night he will get up and get in bed with me.

With the possible exception of Paul, all of the young fathers discussed in this section not only describe their involvement with their children but also the apparent willingness with which their participation is given. They situate themselves as working in partnership with the mother of the child and distributing tasks between them. Perhaps most appealing is how the young men describe being involved in caring for their child, a factor often not referred to in contemporary social work literature and an image not usually associated with socially excluded young men. As Christie (2001) remarks:

Men as carers were both 'invisible' and 'ultra visible'; they became invisible when the gender assumptions by welfare workers excluded them as a potential source of informal care, yet those men who are identified as carers may be 'ultra visible' due to the gendered nature of most caring tasks. Discourses of welfare and social work, for the most part, represent men as either passive recipients of care or resistant recipients of control and not as active providers of care.

(Christie 2001:30)

As previously stated the young men were involved in reconstructing stories of their involvement in their children's lives in a joint interview with me. It is important to restate that there were factors in the interaction between us which may have

encouraged the young men to tell their stories in a particular way, for example, the power relationship between us as well as issues of class and gender. In addition, the absence of other significant people in their lives during the interview, who may have challenged them, may have encouraged them to portray themselves in a more encouraging light. However, the episodes above indicate that the young men want to be seen as being involved in the care of their children.

Three young men, however, do not just talk about their involvement in terms of framing themselves positively in caring for their children, they also talk about their participation in relation to the lack of care supplied by their partner. The stories of Mark and Paul touch upon not only the complexities of domestic work but also the construction of intimate relationships and gender role differentiation. These stories provide a contrast to the episodes in Chapter Five where the young men frame their partners positively in term of what the young women have done for them.

6.4.3. Complex gender relationships

Mark and Paul describe the overt tensions that housework and tidying up causes in their relationships:

Episode 37

Mark: I wouldn't say I do everything, it's just, I don't know, I do him at night, all night, get up about five o'clock in the morning, or well she shoves me 'you

going to get out of bed and sort him out?' and I do housework and all. I don't do cooking, no I don't know how.

Jane: Who does the cooking then?

Mark: She does. That's about it really, I do the washing up and everything else. I bathe him, well basically I do everything but sometimes she does jump in and say like someone comes round say, like I don't know, my Nan, she'll jump and do it just to show them and I can't do nothing about it. It's her work against my word at the end of the day. But I don't know I do love her, I do admit that. I do love her; we've got another one on the way.

Mark portrays providing care for his disabled son but frames his resentment in relation to the lack of contribution provided by his partner and the lack of recognition he feels he gets for his contribution. He describes moving out of traditional gender roles in providing most of the care for his son as well as undertaking most of the domestic chores. He depicts finding his partner's laziness difficult to deal with and appears torn between loving her yet feeling umbrage at having to take the majority of the domestic responsibility. Mark presents her as intransigent and powerful:

Episode 38

Mark: My mum likes her but not as much as she should do. Housework – no way. Washing up, no way.

Jane: How do you cope with that?

Mark: I do it, but I do bite, if you know, I bite at her, saying you should do more, she goes 'oh go and pack your fucking bags then, if you don't like me' in that way because I've been brought up in a soldier's world.

It seems that Mark has had to take up a position outside of the patriarchal gender roles described in his family of origin and also he portrays moving beyond helping because he wants to. He describes a situation where if he does not perform the tasks they will not get done. Despite prompting his partner to take on greater responsibility, he describes her resistance to adopting a traditional female gender position.

This tension of roles is also apparent in Paul's account of his relationship with his partner, whom he describes as 'lazy':

Episode 39

Paul: She was quite lazy, she has no self esteem, her husband destroyed her self esteem, like his dinner he would pick it up and throw the plate on the floor and say if wasn't fit to eat. Erm they washed up when they needed plates, they cleaned the house, well her grandmother would come over and clean the house. So she has never really been. Whereas me, I am quite house proud. When I had my flat, it was, oh I cleaned virtually every day, but that was the way I was brought up, mum cleared the house two or three times a week and we always cleaned our own bedrooms, polished the furniture and hoovered every other day, usually and kept quite clean. So I am quite a clean person by nature. Erm but we tried again and we were together for quite a while and then we split up again because I couldn't cope with Lisa's laziness.

In the episode above Paul situates Lisa negatively but attributes himself with a positive, coherent attitude towards cleaning and being clean. However, unlike Mark he has not directly taken up the position his partner refuses to adopt. He claims that when he was alone the responsibility for tidiness rested with him, but when he describes being with Lisa the inference is that this responsibility transferred to her. It appears that she was not able to maintain this to his standard and his inability to cope with this caused them to separate. Thus, not acting in accordance with traditional gendered practices and not meeting his expectations caused a rift. Paul does not suggest re-establishing past domestic practices when he was on his own, rather he presents the lack of domestic responsibility in terms of his partner's inadequacy.

Although most of the young men in this section present themselves as involved with their child and supportive to their partner, their constructions point to the influence of traditional gender roles on their portrayed gendered practices. Being involved during the night is presented frequently as an indicator of their involvement and this hidden caring may well be a factor which is not considered by professionals involved in families with young parents. However, it is interesting to note that most of the young fathers present their partners as defining the care whilst they make a contribution to this, especially during the day. Where this has broken down, in the examples of Paul and Mark, although the young men present themselves as being able and capable of carrying out the full time care of their children, they highlight that this state of affairs causes tension and resentment in their relationships.

6.4.4. Boundaries of young fatherhood: fear of being viewed as an abuser

Having reviewed the ways in which the young fathers constructed their involvement in the practical care of their children it can also be seen that there are identified limitations, particularly in relation to physical care. Dwayne and Daniel express these limitations when talking about their feelings regarding the appropriateness of bathing and changing their baby daughters. Daniel talks about the discomfort he feel about changing his daughter's nappy. Similarly Dwayne describes feeling concerned about continuing to bathe his daughter as she gets older. I ask Daniel if he changes his daughter's nappy and how he feels about it. The motivation behind my question is about his involvement on a practical level at the 'messy' end of the baby. Daniel, 18, responds to this question in a way that was unexpected to me:

Episode 40

Jane: Do you change her bum and stuff like that?

Daniel: Yeah.

Jane: How do you feel about all that?

Daniel: At first I didn't want to because I thought it weren't right.

Jane: Why do you think it wasn't right?

Daniel: I don't know, I don't know, because it's a girl and people might take it in the wrong way and all.

Jane: But it's your own daughter.

Daniel: Yes, but that's what I though afterwards, I thought it's my own daughter, they can't do nothing.

Jane: Was your dad involved when you were a little baby, did he do all that kind of stuff?

Daniel: Yeah, he didn't change my sister's bum.

Jane: He didn't?

Daniel: No, he'd change ours but not my sister's.

A dominant influence affecting Daniel seems to be the fear associated with being thought of as an abuser by other 'people'. Indeed, he remarks that his own father did not change his sister's nappy, seemingly following his family in what is and is not acceptable for a father to do. On a wider scale, social work is concerned with dealing with familial child sexual abusers and research points to the vulnerability of children to this kind of abuse (Social Services Inspectorate in Scotland 1997). The SSIS (1997) suggest that female children are much more vulnerable to sexual abuse, especially where the abuser lives in the home and where the abuser 'appears passive, dependent and isolated...with no masculine identification' (1997:43). There was no suggestion that Daniel was associated with sexual abuse, however, it was a discourse he seemed aware of and from which he expresses wanting to distance himself. Daniel describes an awareness that his behaviour and actions are being monitored (with the use of the word 'they'). Dwayne, 17, similarly describes a self-imposed boundary around the care of his daughter:

Episode 41

Jane: Do you change nappies?

Dwayne: Yeah bathe her, change her clothes, everything.

Jane: And what about as she gets older, do you think it changes in any way?

Dwayne: Yeah when she gets a bit older I won't bath her, well I don't know but I most probably won't. She just like, if I've got the money and that, and she asks for it, I'll go and get her it.

Dwayne's response here suggests a dilemma in his role, maybe in response to the implication of my question, asking if he will change in any way towards his daughter.

Dwayne's reply indicates that he has an awareness of what may be considered inappropriate in the future, but he describes his dilemma by saying 'well I don't know' and changes the subject to something he perhaps feels more in control of, his daughter's future need for money.

6.4.5. 'Breasts are there to be played with' (Andy age 21)

In addition to feeling prohibited from some aspects of caring, another young man, Andy, describes another gender barrier to being involved as a father. Andy is involved in parenting groups at his local Sure Start and describes himself as being instrumental in setting up a 'dads' group. Andy describes using social services provisions regularly, and as a man reflects on the differing gender discourses accessible and influential within that organisation. He expresses his discomfort at witnessing the baby massage classes, from which he obviously feels excluded, primarily due to the mothers breast feeding:

Episode 42

Andy: I feel like I'm the only man at Sure Start right now.

Jane: And how do you feel about that?

Andy: Embarrassed sometimes.

Jane: Do you?

Andy: Yeah, because, I mean there is a, on a Friday when we go there's like a baby massage and I'm unsure where to look sometimes because the ladies get their breasts out and breast feed some of them. I feel quite embarrassed and I said probably you know I'll just look at my feet or something, and she just goes 'ha ha ha' you know. But to me it's the most natural thing in the world and I shouldn't feel embarrassed about it if the mothers not feeling embarrassed about it. But as a man you do, as men, breasts are there to be played with. Men don't see them as baby feeding implements.

This excerpt is full of contradictions and moral dilemmas for Andy. On the one hand he describes himself as the only man at Sure Start, including male workers (research diary) and as such he is involved in a maternally focussed service provided by women for women and their children. Reflecting on this, Andy refers to how natural breast feeding is and that he should not feel embarrassed by it. On the other hand as a man he reproduces a discourse on breasts as sexualised objects and appears to be struggling regarding where to situate himself on this issue. He does not say that the breast feeding overtly deters him from attending, however, it is an example of the debate mentioned earlier in Chapter Two regarding the essentially feminised nature of services (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001) and the lack of provision for fathers in their own right. As Hearne (2001) points out:

Social services, social work and probation work both have their own particular characteristics and local challenges in terms of men in agencies and men in contact or potentially in contact.

(Hearne 2001:66)

If Andy is the only man regularly involved and attending Sure Start, it may be that other men have also felt deterred from attending or may have removed themselves rather than face the weekly embarrassment described by Andy. It can also be speculated that the lack of male workers may well contribute to the atmosphere and not provide masculine representation in such a feminised environment.

6.5. 'She's a nice lady to know' (Andy age 21): professional support and the positioning of external agencies

The Introduction to the thesis highlighted that the young fathers in this study form a heterogeneous and eclectic mix, drawn from young men who are themselves legally children, young offenders, and young men who have learning and physical disabilities. The key commonalities within this group are that they are young parents and have service user status. At the time of the interview they were all users of statutory social services, albeit in varying and differing ways; some involved on a voluntary basis, attending fathers' groups, some compulsory due to the Child Protection status of their child or children. Moreover, some young men were on orders themselves, for example, care orders or supervision orders made by the court. Their eclectic status in the research is seen as a strength, as social services have to deal with a variety of people with different statuses on a daily basis. As the study has

pointed out their stories have shown many cross cutting themes and issues. One important focus of the data has been to analyse how they perceive and describe using the professional support they have been in contact with. Bearing in mind previous research with young mothers (Reeves 2003), I was particularly interested in evaluating how the young men described the services they had been exposed to during their period of transition to fatherhood. As the data from both chapters has pointed out, the young men in this study have raised issues which are both internal and external to service provision, namely their described feelings in relation to their partner, children and social relationships as well as the organisation of the services.

Previous research with young mothers (Corlyon and McGuire 1997,1999) and research with young people leaving care (Allen 2000; Biehal and Wade 1996) has drawn attention to the difficulty of maintaining continuity and consistently engaging with vulnerable young parents. In addition, as outlined in Chapters One and Two, service provision offered to men and fathers generally is sketchy and under-researched in this country (O'Brien 2004; Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001).

6.5.1. Fear of professional help

A few of the participants in this study identified that the most obstructing factor to accepting help and support from social services was the fear that their children would be taken away. Mark, 18, presented this as a very real fear for him:

Episode 43

Mark: I think they're just there to take him away from me.

Jane: Do you think that is likely?

Mark: No, but that's just the way I feel because I have never been around them, I don't know the [.....] I don't know how they work. It's what I've heard recently, you know. They put you in foster care, you don't ever see him again, things like that.

Mark draws attention to the fear associated with the formal agency of social services and the lack of power he sees as having against them. He expresses his lack of knowledge about how social services work and positions himself as having few rights. This seems compounded by his lack of information regarding his social worker and the purpose and focus of her involvement, whether for him or the child. He describes his extremely negative reaction to the involvement of social services:

Episode 44

Mark: I don't know who my social worker is. I don't really, I don't get told really because I'll go mental. If a social worker comes into the house I just blank them and look at the ground or something or get huffed up, but I don't shout or bite at them, I just look at the floor and I don't know. If they ask me a nice question, yeah I will speak to them, if they talk about social workers and carry on talking about it, I won't talk to them. It's just, I don't know, it's hard.

Mark's account is similar to Andy's, when he describes 'looking away' when he is challenged by social services. Social work inevitably brings an imbalance in power

(Waterhouse and McGhee 1998) and social workers exist within the 'constraints of social structures' (Daniel and Taylor 2001) which guide how they work. Mark indicates his discomfort with his perceived lack of power. Ben, 19, highlights how this discomfort materialised for him from his involvement with a family centre and how he felt the staff misrepresented his actions:

Episode 45

Ben: We done over there, we didn't get on with the people over there, so we don't go anymore.

Jane: Why didn't you get on with the people Ben? Was it the people who ran it or the other people?

Ben: Yeah, no. It was the people who ran it. Louise was mostly like telling lies about us two.

Jane: To who?

Ben: Going back to the social, like saying we don't kiss Karen goodbye, don't say goodbye to her, well we do but. They never turned up for those appointments like.

Ben describes his dislike of being talked about and what he felt to be the lies told about him. The apparent response from social services, however, reveals a flexible and understanding approach by making arrangements for him to attend a different family centre, albeit further away. He explains how positive the regime in this new centre is for him, his partner and his child:

Episode 46

Jane: And what kinds of things do you do there?

Ben: We talk about playing, how to play and all of that, the like we play games and like that end up like little kids. You're getting to learn a little but more and the people what are in that place make sure that every body understands it and everybody has like got to join in and not leave anybody out or anything.

Jane: And you take Karen with you?

Ben: Yeah, oh yeah, she loves it. You say to her 'are you going to play?' That's it, big smile.

The approach apparently adopted by the workers, based upon allowing him to act like a child, appears engaging to him and is described as having productive results. Social services ensure that their message, hidden amongst the play, is communicated ensuring everyone participates and that they all fully understand what has been going on.

6.5.2. Positive professional support

There is evidence which suggests that individuals involved with social services in a forced or compulsory way, perhaps due to having their child on the Child Protection Register or are the subject of court proceedings, are less likely to feel positive towards social services and their social worker (Reeves 2003; Allen 2003; Corlyon and McGuire 1997). As Waterhouse and McGhee point out (1998) in families where there were multiple or complex issues the 'attitude, skills and efforts' (1998:287) of

individual social workers are crucial to achieving effective partnership working. As Ben's description highlights working closely in partnership can have positive and constructive benefits for both children and parents (Thoburn *et al* 1995). The stories of Andy, Jay and Shaun considered below show how difficult this process can be but also how effective clarity and honesty are in working with young fathers.

Shaun, 19, with one biological daughter in foster care at the time of the interview as well as another baby on the way, explained his general distrust of social services. However, this description was tempered by the expression of his faith in Kate, the family's current social worker. As previously stated Shaun was not an 'easy' young man to interview. I was aware from Kate his social worker of his past violence towards his partner and at times felt uncomfortable in his home (research diary). The interview did not take the shape of an easy interaction between two people, but was rather staccato and disjointed in places. Nonetheless, Shaun explains his position towards social services:

Episode 47

Jane: What do you think of social services?

Shaun: What do I think of them?

Jane: Yeah.

Shaun: The only person I did trust is Kate.

Jane: Yes. Was or do?

Shaun: No, I do. Was, and I do trust her.

Jane: OK why?

Shaun: Because she's upfront and tells you straight.

Jane: Straight down the line, like what's happening and what's..

Shaun: She keeps you on that straight line; with like the others and the one we've had in the past, they just twist things.

Jane: How do you mean they twist things?

Shaun: Well because we see the kids, we're not allowed to take them to the park because we talk and tell them things. We have never told them things we shouldn't tell them.

Jane: So how do you feel about that? How do you feel about them saying things like that?

Shaun: Well I don't like them, don't trust them and I never will trust them.

Jane: Right. Can you see they're doing their job in society?

Shaun: I can see they're doing their job, yeah, but they also wreck people's lives.

The one we got now is, but the only one and true one I do trust, like I said is Kate.

In the episode above Shaun demonstrates his generally negative attitude towards social services, indicating his view that 'they wreck lives'. However, within this moral reproach he identifies that his individual social worker is not like this, she can be trusted as she is candid, direct and does not 'twist' things. Shaun seems to respect this as a position. Similarly Andy, 21, comments upon the frankness and precision that social services adopt in their dealings with him and his partner and it is obvious that he feels an integral part of this process, even if at times this is uncomfortable for him. Describing his weekly meetings at the family centre with his social worker Andy remarks:

Episode 48

Andy: We discuss any concerns or any concerns she has or she'll ask if there were anything. We have meetings every now and then and that's when everything is brought up and said 'this is what you need to be doing' or 'you're doing this well and this needs to be improved on' and stuff like that.

Jane: And do you find that helpful?

Andy: Yes. Sometimes I feel like they're having a go at us and I go all quiet and all hot and bothered and just look away.

Paul, 24, also adopts a generally negative position towards social services describing them as child snatchers, but highlights how helpful they have been to his partner:

Episode 49

Paul: I am of one opinion, most people think social services are there to come and take their kid away. Well, I see a completely different side to social services. I see them trying to help Lisa, you can't fault them.

Jay, 19, also takes up this positive position explaining that social services have been 'wonderful' due to their directness with him and their clear aim of protecting his child, albeit from him:

Episode 50

Jay: Social services have had a bad name. I won't lie and when they first came to this flat, I don't know what I looked like, but I wasn't happy. But I agree now they are wonderful people.

Jane: Tell me why they're wonderful, because that's interesting.

Jay: Yeah, why are they wonderful?

Jane: Yeah why do you think they are wonderful, because I'll be honest..

Jay: Well at the point of his birth, at the point of his birth when he screams and I can't handle it. I had thoughts that I shouldn't of had. Only thoughts, mind you, and now them thoughts could have endangered my baby, you know? Well, I told social services this, it seemed very harsh what they did to me, like make my girlfriend move back with her mum and the baby and if she don't they'd have put a care order on my child, that was the case wasn't it. So I let them move back in.

Jane: So what's made you think that they've been brilliant then?

Jay: They took my baby out of danger ain't they? They have really, they have, and I honestly see that as a strong point to all of this.

Jay describes seeing his partner and child most days through contact visits at his home and in the local family centre. In the episode above Jay identifies with the protectionalist discourse offered by social services and aligns himself with their aims to protect children. By doing this Jay appears a more conforming character and

presents himself in a more positive light, perhaps with the thought that this may return his partner and child home. For Jay, working in partnership offers a clear route to getting back his partner and child. He further highlights how encouraged he feels with the feedback he is getting from his social worker, Gail. I ask him about the long term plan:

Episode 51

Jay: My long term plan is to get the baby home.

Jane: Right, is that on the cards do you think?

Jay: Yeah, yeah that is. They've said to me, Gail has definitely said to me we're in the right direction. Definitely, aren't we darling, we're definitely..

Jane: And have you got a time limit on that?

Jay: No, no they can't say that, because they need to take an assessment of my risk about me, but I understand that.

In the social work literature one of the identified discourses in relation to men (see Chapter Two) is perceiving them as risks (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 2001; Featherstone 2003). Jay has identified himself as a risk and has an investment in trying to move his identity position away from this. Daniel and Taylor (2001) argue that one of the problems of assessing men as risks is that it often places emphasis on the ability of the mother to protect, rather than addressing the perpetrator directly:

Paradoxically, although child protection practice tends to be focussed on issues of risk (Department of Health 1995) there is often a lack of explicit attention to the risks

that men may potentially pose to children and their mothers. Even when a father or father figure is clearly identified as a perpetrator of abuse the focus of assessment and ongoing intervention is with the mother and her ability to protect her child.

(Daniel and Taylor 2001:24)

Jay's narrative makes clear that he has been assessed in his own right and he is the subject of ongoing assessment in interactions with his partner and child at the family centre. In addition, he is taking anti-depressants and receiving counselling. In the episode below he identifies how he felt he was a risk:

Episode 52

Jay: When he screams on two or three occasions I felt as if I could pinch my baby and now I wouldn't, but I told social services because it's the right thing to do and that's the risk. They cannot take a chance to let my baby sleep of a night-time when he might scream at four o'clock in the morning, that I might pinch him and me going the next day and saying 'I told you so'. Because I don't want that. They've set me up with counselling. I do counselling and I'm on the mend mate, definitely on the mend.

It is argued here that Jay's story is one positive example where a comprehensive individual assessment has resulted in him receiving a package of care as a father, rather than just removing the mother and child to protect them. In addition, Jay indicates he is changing his identity from a young man who is a potential risk, to that of a more compliant figure who is working in partnership, although this must be

tempered with the thought that this may be a strategy to get his partner and baby back. For some of the young fathers in the study, like Jay, being perceived as a good parent was something they had to focus on because their children had been removed or were on the Child Protection Register. As Jay describes, understanding the social work discourse of being a good parent, and co-operating with the aims of social services is the key to getting your child back. In order to achieve this Jay has had to be involved. Co-operating with and understanding the demands made by social services is also presented as important by Ben, 19, especially if he wants to keep his current and expected child:

Episode 53

Jane: Is Karen on the 'at risk' register?

Ben: Yes.

Jane: She is? Do you know why?

Ben: Because she's under neglect.

Jane: Under neglect, right why do you think that is?

Ben: We don't know, like that's what the council, not the council, the social worker put her under, but it really upset Liz, so we're hoping this time she's coming off it.

Jane: Right, so you have to go to the case conferences. Do you have a social worker that comes round?

Ben: Yes, she's coming round today at two.

Jane: And how do you get on with her?

Ben: OK, and like mum's going to be here at one, the social's coming at two.

Jane: And what kinds of things does she talk to you about? You don't mind?

Ben: No. She like looks round the place to see if there is anything dangerous, not dangerous and everything like that so..

Jane: How do you find all of that?

Ben: Like in a way it's off putting but like when she goes we do all the things like what she said.

It is interesting to note Ben's demonstration of a compliant attitude to being told what to do and his clear understanding the implications if he does not. His mother's presence during the social work visits also seems important to him, indicating her part in providing ongoing support to the couple.

6.5.3. The role of Sure Start

In addition to talking about the statutory services some of the young men talked positively about the role of Sure Start in their lives. The types of help offered by Sure Start were identified as firstly, their ability to recognize the importance of tackling issues specific to men; secondly, their approachability and thirdly, how understanding their organisational aims is useful in working with them. Andy, 21, outlines how he felt able to air his thoughts and feelings as a man in relation to his child at Sure Start meetings and how his ideas were subsequently taken on board by the organisation, emphasising the responsiveness of the initiative to local ideas and needs:

Episode 54

Andy: I mean, Sure Start up the road have asked for ideas for men's groups. I suggested that maybe, you know, I felt like an absolute idiot playing with my daughter, when I was playing you know, making funny noises, maybe they could have a group on how to deal with that and how to play with your child, how not to be too rough as a man. And I also suggested also maybe within the same group how to change your baby and to feel confident around her or him. And the screaming of Sophia and her temper tantrums, even now it gets to me and it really makes me want to strangle her, you know it makes me want to shake her. So I can understand how people have done it. I got to the point where I thought 'no this ain't right this is wrong' and I cried because I felt that way and I phoned mum and she said 'yes I felt like that with you [.....]. Anyway I suggested this up at the group, how to cope with the crying and what to do- don't shake, because I felt like doing it. I said 'as a man I can't cope and I get really wound up about it, how do other men feel, how do they cope?'

The literature reviewed earlier suggested that professionals working with fathers do not often directly engage with men in families. There was also evidence that many men find it difficult to express their feelings, particularly to health and care professionals, and that men do not often engage with the services provided. Daniel and Taylor (2001) further argue that one of the key messages for social work practice when working with men is, that if a man is considered a risk this facet 'should be dealt with explicitly' (2001:39) rather than implicitly through the mother. Andy, Jay,

Ben, Paul and Shaun indicate that they have all been worked with directly by social services, a positive move towards good practice. Andy in the episode above also describes directly engaging with a non-statutory agency. Firstly he is positioning himself as asking for help, as a man, not as part of a couple. Secondly, he is highlighting that there are specific issues which need to be addressed both as a parent and a man. His example cites the discomfort he feels when engaging in play with his daughter but also accepts that men can often be unintentionally too rough with their children, contributing towards some men being perceived as risks. Thirdly, Manuel draws attention to the usefulness of sharing experiences with other fathers 'they just seem to have different conversations' and sympathetic staff. This factor is also drawn attention to by Paul, 24, telling about how one of the Sure Start staff lent him a book about how to play with his child:

Episode 55

Paul: She lent me a fantastic book on bringing up boys erm which I will sit and read. The things you don't think of, the things that I do naturally, she said one of the big things about boys is boys need men because men play rough with them, crawl around on the floor and throw them about.

Fourthly, in Episode 56 Andy also describes being able to share his feelings and frustrations and asking for a forum to explore how other men cope; seeking other men to help him form his identity as a father. He is not asking for the help of women either as mothers or workers, but expresses wanting to know directly how other men feel. A forum for young fathers to express their feelings is not common practice to date

within social work. Andy identifies that there are issues specific to being a man, for example, potentially being a risk to a child as well as being a father which need tackling together and possibly without women. As Farmer and Owen point out (1995, 1998) very often when the father is the perpetrator of violence, intervention often focuses on persuading the mother to part from him and the emotional and practical support is focussed her. As Daniel and Taylor (1999, 2001) argue, fathers who are risks are unlikely to contact social services directly and admit they have a problem, although this was a course of action that Jay described engaging in.

The narratives of Andy, Jay, Ben, Dwayne, Daniel open the possibility for acknowledging that young men are carers for their children and have different attitudes and issues from the usual maternal focus of services. They may therefore need practical help and strategies for dealing with the joys and frustrations (seeing themselves as risks) of their involvement as well as the embarrassing and difficult (breast feeding and nappy changing) as well as communicating with members of new social networks. Professionals need to harness these opportunities especially with young fathers who have previously had such negative life experiences. Andy tells of his feelings when his ideas were acted upon by Sure Start, 'I'm proud that my ideas were taken on board, I was really happy'.

Manuel highlights the second positive aspect of the service provided by Sure Start to him as a father, namely, their approachability and ability to listen. I ask Manuel, 22, what makes them approachable:

Episode 56

Manuel: More experience, they really are talkative, want to get to know you, just make you feel welcome. That makes me want to talk to them and have a chat. Those that are toffee nosed and stuck up I don't want to talk to them. But when you get someone who is a bit more down to earth, a bit more casual, then you want to talk to them and hope they can help.

It can be conjectured that Sure Start are able to take up this more relaxed and friendly position with users as they do not have a statutory duty and do not directly take children into care. However, the attitude of professionals is described as being absolutely crucial to engaging with fathers (Daniel and Taylor 2001) and this is reinforced by Manuel above and some of the other participants in this study. All too often, professionals may be constrained by the assessment framework, risk and time and it is easy to focus on what needs to be covered rather than taking the time to connect on a personal level.

Peter, 24, suggests that working with Sure Start is easier when you understand their aims and what they are trying to do:

Episode 57

Peter: I know it sounds off, but it is hard to put your trust in them because they are total strangers dealing with your baby. But once they do actually do

something and you actually notice it, that was quite impressive, you learn to work with them. They are good now. Especially once you understand what they are trying to do.

This was also a point highlighted earlier by Jay and Dwayne. Clarity, directness and honesty within partnership are perceived as vital ingredients for working effectively with socially excluded young fathers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.0. INTRODUCTION

In the Introduction several aims were identified which have guided the progress of the thesis. The main objective of the study was to understand how young men, who were users of the statutory social services, describe their transition to fatherhood and the strategies and resources they use to do this. The quote in the title by John, '*You've got to keep your head on*' was used to encapsulate how the majority of the white, working-class men in this study portrayed rising to the challenge of young fatherhood. Specifically, I interpreted keeping their 'heads on' as referring to the complex process of altering their roles, relationships and identities, by trying to keep their thoughts together during this significant and transitional time.

Several key elements were highlighted in the Introduction which have been integral to the study and incorporated into the body of the thesis; including the use of a research diary, my reflections on my part on the research process, and attempt at transparency, making ongoing judgments in context, the exploration of narrative methods, the use of a discursive framework to explore young masculinity and young fatherhood and the concept of social exclusion. In this chapter discussion of the main findings of this thesis

will be drawn together in five main sections, directly related to addressing the aims identified in the introduction to the thesis and including the key elements. Incorporated will be a discussion of the implications for both theory and practice. The first section begins by evaluating the methodological approach on this study (research aims five and six) namely the use of narrative approaches with white, working-class socially excluded, young fathers. The discussion is started here as it has been argued throughout the thesis that the use of this approach, and my role in this, had implications for the knowledge and findings created. The second section addresses the findings set out in Chapter Five regarding the descriptions from ten of the young men in the study, of the description and positive construction of their social identities during the transition to fatherhood. Their progressive stories portray the various constructions of masculinity they drew on and how, through significant relationships with their partners and children, they describe altering their social practices. The third section draws on the findings outlined in Chapter Six and evaluates the position of wider familial relationships and support networks as well as the strategies the young men describe using in their evolving identities as young fathers. The fourth section analyses how the young fathers portrayed negotiating professional discourses. Finally, based on these findings the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

7.1. The approach of the study: some conclusions about narrative interviews with socially excluded young fathers

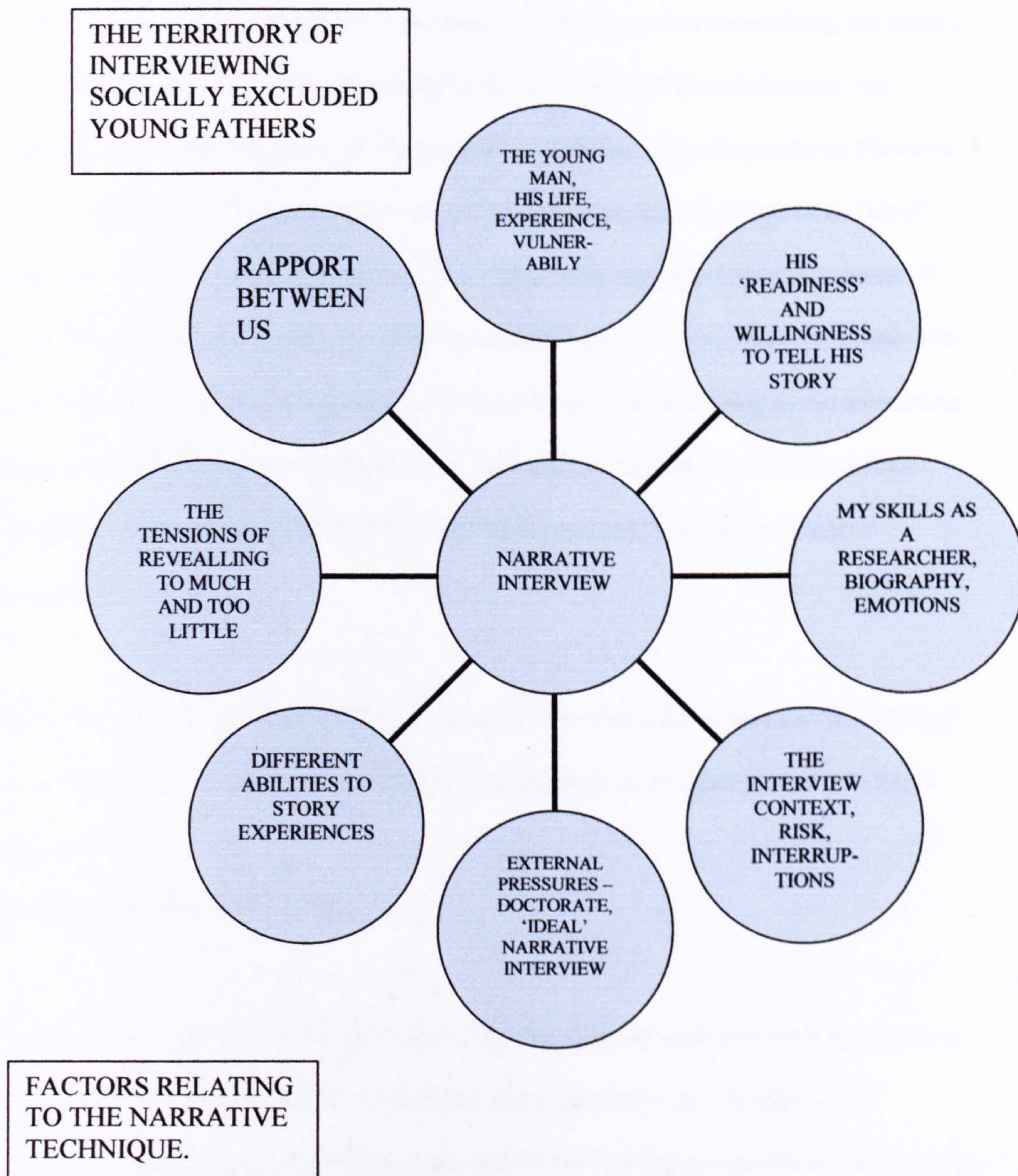
The work of Harre and Van Langenhove (1999) set out in Chapter Two, argued that stories are the method through which individual positions and identities are navigated. They argue that stories are the resource through which locations are taken up by individuals, relational to the context of the conversation and corresponding to the co-constructed role adopted by the other or others. They also point out that the position and role of the 'other' in conversations, with their moral and personal attitudes, are significant in how a story will be told or how a narrative will unfold. In addition, they claim that individuals often have intention in how they position themselves but that this can be negated by the response and position of the other or others in the interaction.

It was quite evident from the interviews with the young fathers in this study that the 'other' in the interview (me), as well as many other significant factors, impacted considerably on how a young man told his story and how he placed himself and others. In terms of using a narrative approach it has been argued throughout this study that all of the young men managed, to a greater or lesser degree, to relay plots in their stories about the transition to fatherhood, although some of the stories were disjointed and brief in places. They also introduced varying characters from their social and familial networks. These characters involved 'villains', for example fathers and mothers who had left their lives and fathers who had abused them. They also included 'heroes', fathers, who came back into their lives with positive offers of help or 'heroines' mothers who were

presented as offering considerable day to day support. In addition, all of the young fathers discussed in Chapter Five positioned their partners as heroines, portraying them as rescuing them from previous anti-social or dangerous behavior. Other partners, discussed in Chapter Six were not constructed so positively, but were used to present the young man in a more positive light, especially in relation to his contribution to caring for his child and his contribution to domestic chores.

As Chapters Four, Five and Six have portrayed, the findings put forward in this thesis are based upon knowledge gained from the co-constructed interviews and as I argued in Chapter Four, the interviews were all affected by a number of inter-related but significant factors. These factors were internal and external to the interview and which impacted on its shape and construction and ultimately affected the knowledge produced. These are represented below in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Factors affecting narrative interviews



During the fieldwork phase of the study through listening to and transcribing the tapes I was reassured that the production of talk between myself and the participants was constructing stories with plots, characters and descriptions of social practices. However, I was unduly influenced at the time by the subsequently unrealistic image of an 'ideal' narrative interview (research diary). In this 'ideal' and imaginary interview, hours of uninterrupted talk by a participant (directly related to my research interests) would flow, with a few well chosen and appropriate remarks from me contributing to the interaction. As some of the episodes in Chapters Four, Five and Six have indicated, this did not always take place. As Alldred and Gillies (2002) point out from the researchers' perspective:

It is more comfortable reading an account of an interview which spares us from seeing how messy our own speech is, our requests for affirmation or repetition of 'you know' and 'right'.

(Alldred and Gillies 2002:160).

As I indicated in the Introduction to the thesis, facing up to your own development as a researcher is an uncomfortable and complex and experience. As Chapter Three highlighted, the process of gaining access to and interviewing young fathers proved to be extremely difficult, with a heavy reliance on gatekeepers. Consequently, when I managed to secure an interview my expectations of myself and the interview were high.

Although some young men did talk freely and uninterruptedly, very often this produced pages of text but large sections were unrelated to the aims of the study (Reissman 1994). When a young man did not talk as I would have liked, I was overly concerned that the interview would be wasted and this, to some extent, affected the way I behaved in the interaction.

In addition, although my role was a significant influence on how a young father told his story, also relevant were a variety of other factors set out in Figure 7, including him as a person, his experiences, whether he wanted to talk about them, what the pressures were on him that day, whether it was a happy or sad story and the context of the interview. In addition, the socially excluded nature of the group I interviewed undoubtedly impacted upon the narrative interviews in varying ways, ranging from the unforeseen influence their disadvantage and vulnerability had on me as a person, to the overcrowded circumstances that some of the young men were living in and were interviewed in. As a researcher working with vulnerable young people, particularly in their own homes, the information gathered may be coloured by their circumstances and environment, and if acknowledged and analysed this can bring a valuable perspective to the data. A possible tension for the researcher can be that acknowledging unforeseen circumstances, events or environments can place the researcher in a position of vulnerability.

In retrospect, however, there is considerable evidence from the interviews in this study that acknowledging these factors, rather than dismissing or hiding them, adds to the context and value of the knowledge generated. Returning to Alldred and Gillies (2002)

they make the point that it is easy not to include 'unsuccessful' interviews or difficult transcripts as this contributes to:

the unintentional way in which research ends up representing a narrower range of people, experiences and ways of being.

(Alldred and Gillies 2002:161)

In addition to the factors outlined in Figure 7, there was a further influence on the knowledge produced between myself and the young fathers, relating to the theoretical stance adopted in the study. Namely, that the positions taken during the interviews may have been related to implicit expectations of dominant discourses which reinforced how we behaved and presented ourselves. Specifically, how the participants told their stories and how I reacted was a description, not only of how they framed themselves and others, but also of their desire, in the context of the interview, to be seen as conforming. Marks (1996) points out how the young people in her study (who had all been excluded from school) narrated their negative behavior in terms of repentance, producing themselves in her interviews as reformed characters and reflexive self regulating individuals. If this stance is applied to the findings of the young men in this study, particularly the young men in Chapter Five, it can be theorized that they narrated themselves through subject positions which functioned to present them in ways which were conforming and acceptable and the interview was part of a normalizing process for them, narrating themselves into positions of responsibility. The process of the research, therefore, helped

to create a forum for some service using fathers to present themselves as sensible and dependable individuals.

7.2. The transition to young fatherhood

The research findings in this study give support to the notion that masculine identities during the transition to young fatherhood are constructed through experience and negotiated through social relationships and language. Specifically, the young fathers described and presented (within the context of interviews with me) their identities as fluid and reconstructed within relationships with their partner and wider families. The individual stories told by the young men varied, especially in the complexity of their personal and family biographies. Many, but not all, of the young men described having fragmented birth families and having had previous and ongoing negative social relationships within them. They described having complex lives and complex relationships.

Chapter Five highlighted that a group of the participants described their experiences of the transition to fatherhood in similar ways, despite the obvious differences of their birth families and the methods they told their stories (either expressively or lacking in wider detail). These young men positioned the current relationship with the mother of their child and the event of becoming a father as part of an overall optimistic and progressive narrative of their lives and identity construction (Gergen 1994) explaining away past reckless behaviour as a phase in their lives.

As Foucault and more recent discursive commentators have argued (Carabine, 2001; Weedon 1987; Carabine 2001) discourses are historically and contextually situated and, as the literature in Chapter One highlighted, many of the discourses available to white, working-class, socially excluded young men are negative (Jones 2003). In addition, drawing on the work of Raby (2002) young people are often constructed negatively through the power relations of dominant discursive regimes. From the stories of the young men in Chapter Five it is possible to see how the experiences they constructed regarding their involvement in reckless behaviour identified with Raby's (2002) generic definition of adolescence as 'ungoverned and in need of control' (2002:430). By focusing on the recklessness stage of their story where they described positioning themselves as out of control and behaving in selfish and irresponsible ways, conclusions could have been drawn which confirmed a negative depiction of most of the young men in the study. Indeed, comparisons could have been made with the Labour government rhetoric, *Supporting Families: A Consultation Document* (Home Office 1998):

Increasingly boys and young men seem to have difficulty maturing into responsible citizens and fathers. Declining educational performance, loss of traditional 'male' jobs, the growth of a 'laddish' anti-social culture, greater use of drugs, irresponsible teenage fatherhood and the rising suicide rate may all show rising insecurity and uncertainty among young men. (Home Office, 1998:48-9).

However, although a small study, by asking them to describe their representations of the transition to fatherhood, two further phases, rescue and responsibility, were identified through which the young men described fashioning their more recent identities and portraying themselves in a more positive light. These positive consequences of fatherhood can be seen as being situated in the wider literature of desistance from criminal activity and anti-social behaviour (MacDonald and Marsh 2005; Webster *et al* 2006).

As Edley and Wetherell (1997) argue, discourses are not static and individuals, by the positions they take up, are both the products and producers of discourse. The interviews with the fathers in Chapter Five in particular encapsulate this process as, in the interview situation with me, they described how they were contributing to and positioning themselves within more positive discourses on young fatherhood. Fatherhood was positioned optimistically by them and described as the key to a dramatic change in their identity construction and reported behavior. This finding is in direct contrast to much of the literature on young parents generally (SEU 1999, Swann *et al* 2003) and young fathers specifically (Hudson and Ineichen 1991) where outcomes are often presented negatively. However, as Chapter One pointed out, the vast majority of research literature on young parents focuses on and is from the perspective of the young mother with descriptions from young fathers largely absent from the debate. Consequently the importance of this study, although based on a limited number of participants and only offering a described snapshot of their lives, is the contribution it has made to the literature on young fathers in the UK. As Chapter Six set out, even those young men in this study

who did not construct their relationship with their partner positively spoke with affection about their children and positively about their interactions with them.

The interviews in this study, therefore, indicate how some young men describe negotiating and re-negotiating their positions and identities as fathers positively within the wider social, cultural, familial and institutional discourse available to them. Their descriptions of the roles of responsibility they have taken on and the anti-social activities they depict giving up, demonstrate not only their perceived individual agency and described ability to self regulate with changing circumstances, but also their desire to be seen as conforming and to present themselves positively. In addition their descriptions positively aligned them with recent discourses of new fatherhood, whereby fathers are involved to a greater degree practically and emotionally with their children (Tyrer *et al* 2005). The identities the young fathers in Chapter Five presented to me during the interview, from the midst of their complex lives and relationships, described their desire to adapt to changing circumstances, adopt greater responsibility for themselves, their partner and, for nearly all of them, their child.

7.3. Resources for changing identities

It was quite evident how important other people were in the described processes of identity reconstruction for the young men in this study, either in helping or hindering their progress. The descriptions and positioning of others ranged from the stated significance of their partners (who were mostly very young themselves), other adults in

their family and social networks and professionals from statutory and non statutory agencies.

7.3.1. Partners

For ten of the young men their partners were presented as the heroines in their stories.

These young women were situated as agents who altered the course of the young man's life and previous negative behaviour. Previous literature has highlighted the link between the early teenage years and engaging in reckless behaviour particularly for some young men (Frosh *et al* 2002; Connell 2000; Dennison and Coleman 2000; Coleman and Hendry 2004) and the stories depicted in this research have emphasized this. Some of the young men in this study described how they were too immature at the time to see the links between their reckless behaviour and the consequences both for themselves and other people. Their partners were often presented as crucial in this process of understanding and change. They were portrayed as being different from other girls, distinguished in terms of their personal characteristics (calming them down or encouraging them to alter their behaviour) their class, or how the young man described feeling about them. Some young men also portrayed distancing themselves from their previous (male) associates to further enhance this partnership, a feature highlighted in other work with young offenders (Webster *et al* 2006; Laub and Sampson 2003). Connected to this was how some described wanting to make a good impression on their partner's family. In addition, the child was also situated positively in their stories, not

only because the young man described wanting to be with the child, but also because of their perceived new role as a positive influence on the child.

For partners not described or situated as heroines they were often framed in terms of their inadequacies as mothers. This negative presentation, although complex, often served to offer the opportunity for a young man to portray himself (in particular Mark and Paul) in a positive light, particularly in relation to their contribution to domestic chores and looking after their child. Although not reluctant to care for their child, their descriptions indicated resentment at having to carry the bulk of the domestic responsibility because their partners would not; they portrayed going beyond providing help because they wanted to. Indeed, most of the young men in the study portrayed themselves as caring involved fathers. However, as discussed below this was, for the majority of the young men, in relation to their partner as the main carer.

7.3.2. Parents

The stories of parental involvement in their lives were complex. A particular factor in this seemed to relate to the participants status as service users now and in the past, whereby the majority described experiencing fragmented family lives in their families of origin and, included in this, parental relationships. A few young men, however, for example Keith, Ben, Paul and Andy, described retaining a sense of connection with their parents both during their transition to adulthood and fatherhood. Indeed, the birth of their child was not presented as a traumatic event or unduly affecting the ongoing relationship

with their parents. The stories described that communication with parents could be ongoing, re-negotiated or started up again. The stories of Andy, Keith, Ben and Paul portrayed how some of their mothers, who were described in terms of always being there for them, had continued in a positive supportive relationship following the birth of their child. This aspect of the study highlighted a useful focus for future research, in relation to how a mother provides support to her son when he becomes a young father. Other participants, for example Jay, John, Dwayne, Victor, Luke and Adam described more ambivalent relationships with their mothers, largely based on the lack of contact they now had with them. Prohibiting factors in the renegotiation of this maternal relationship were described as the presence of step fathers, the mothers' perceived independence, her drug use and a complex care or offending history from the young man.

Fathers often appeared in the stories and were presented either as heroes or villains.

Depictions as villains were often a result of descriptions of previous bad relationships and experiences, either being abused by their father or having been left at an early age.

However, of particular interest was how Luke, Dwayne and Daniel re-constructed their fathers positively and as reappearing in their lives, establishing new lines of communication with them and bringing with them opportunities and new contexts for the young men to act out their described, new responsible identities. For a few young men, the child and the young man's role as a father were positioned as a healing factor in their paternal relationship. For participants whose fathers had always been present in their lives, some described a renegotiation of relationships largely based upon the young man reporting a change in his understanding of his father.

7.3.3. The importance of the child

A common way in which all the young men demonstrated their masculine identities was through their descriptions of the pleasure their children brought to them. All of the young men in this study described the affection they had for their children and how they saw themselves, in varying capacities, in their lives now and in the future. The presence of the child was central to the description of reconstructed positive identities.

Being a father was also described as having implications for the gendered practices they engaged with. Many of the young men described these practices as being multiple, sometimes contradictory to expected gender relationships and relational to their situation. Most of the young men presented themselves with a degree of flexibility to their domestic situations and in the roles they undertook. Nearly all of the young fathers portrayed how involved they were in caring for their child even if this was in relation to their partner or was in terms of providing 'hidden' care for example during the night. Lewis (2000) in his review of fathers and families in the UK identified that although mothers are still more involved generally in looking after the children than fathers, fathers' involvement in the home has been increasing. He claims:

Fathers in many homes are reported to play a central role as playmates for younger children and as organizers of family activities. Mothers, children and fathers often

described men's family role in terms of being 'involved' a concept they found hard to define, but appeared to include psychological availability as well as physically being there.

(Lewis 2000:4).

As Mark and Paul described in Chapter Six, being involved is a complex process. Mark described explicitly struggling with his partner's indifference to housework, the expectations of his family and his own inclination in relation to the role he should adopt. Similarly Paul portrayed being in the role of the full time carer to his son, primarily due to the stated inadequacies of the mother of his child.

The descriptions from the young men in this study concur with one of the lesser points made by Lewis (2000) that, although the outlook for most young fathers in terms of the longevity of the relationship with the mother may be poor, young fathers who live with their partner and children are usually 'very involved in childcare' (2000:6), particularly if they are unemployed. This finding is again contrary to general depictions of teenage fathers (Corlyon and McGuire 1997; Hudson and Ineichen 1991). Contemporary views on fatherhood generally still include two disparate discourses: one which emphasizes the father as a provider (Bowl 2001) and the other which encourages fathers' participation in family life (Robb 2004). Exploration of the 'subjective experience' (Robb 2004:396) of young fatherhood in this thesis has indicated that most of the participants, with their unemployed status, were not providers in the traditional sense, although some did express an interest in doing this. However, many of the young fathers did present themselves as

being involved in the lives of their young families, and saw themselves doing this in the future. For some of the young men, unlike their fathers, their unemployed status gave them more time to describe engaging in this role.

7.3.4. Forming new relationships

The findings of this study broadened the conclusions of previous work in relation to gatekeeping relationships between members of his partner's family and a young father. Previous research has highlighted the importance of the relationship between maternal grandmothers and young fathers, particularly in negotiating access to the child (Gavin *et al* 2002). The findings outlined in the research in this study draw attention to other significant gatekeeping relationships. For example, some of the young fathers described having to navigate through and carve out a position in relation to his partner's father especially where the young woman was currently living with her parents or seemed to have a generally positive relationship with them. This process of negotiation was part of the general positive identity reconstruction towards being seen as dependable and trustworthy and, although highlighting difficulties and tensions, all of the young men who talked about their partner's parents described wanting to construct themselves positively.

7.3.5. The use of professional resources

The research outlined in Chapter Two identified that discourses in social welfare are not gender neutral and that mothers are still seen as the main carers for children as well as being the main point of contact for professionals working with vulnerable families. The evidence reviewed by Daniel and Taylor (1999, 2001) and O'Brien (2004) as well as others (Speak *et al* 1997; Tyrer *et al* 2005) suggested that men and fathers are often presented as having little involvement in the emotional life of the family and this position is largely compounded by the statutory social services, who tend not to see them as providers or recipients of care in their own right. Negative discourses associated with perceiving men as risks have also been highlighted and discussed by Daniel and Taylor (1999, 2001) and Featherstone (2003) as limiting professional involvement with men.

The research findings in this study give support to the complexities involved for professionals working with young fathers. Some of the stories told by the young fathers constructed them as involved carers who wanted to project themselves as engaged in the physical and emotional care of their children, as well as supporting their partner. This is a key finding which I would argue social workers and health visitors need to harness when working directly with young fathers. Clear examples of good professional practice were highlighted through the stories the young men told, whereby even young men who were perceived as risks, or their child was seen to need official external monitoring (Andy, Paul, Jay, Dwayne) gave descriptive examples of how statutory and voluntary services were engaging with them individually and in their own right as fathers, through targeted case work with them. These few cases would seem to be examples of social services perceiving and working with men as both risks and resources (Featherstone

2003). Moreover, some young men also described how positively they reacted to being dealt with honestly and directly in the spirit of partnership. However, these findings were tempered by other examples whereby young men still described feeling uncomfortable in services which are predominately maternally focused and run and in which they felt they occupied a difficult place as a main carer, indicating there is further to go with the deep cultural shift in the provision of services (Featherstone 2001). Although this was only a small group of young men, and only presented a described snapshot of their lives, their social workers and the professionals they worked with were portrayed as being predominately female, with virtually no male workers. Although currently the impact of male workers with young fathers is under-researched it is perhaps the lack of male workers combined with a maternal focus which makes some young fathers feel difficult and on the margins of service provision. Strikingly, however, the findings from the young men in this study still support some of the findings from ten years ago, outlined by Speak *et al* in 1997:

There are few services or groups set up specifically for young men with children. The very few father support groups in the country tend to attract older men, and the support and education systems surrounding young single mothers are not well-attended by the young fathers. Some of the fathers in the study had attended parent-and-toddler groups with their children but had not found the situation comfortable or helpful. Youth and community workers were reported as being the most supportive but this was generally ascribed to the attitude of individual workers, rather than the service itself.

(Speak *et al* 1997:3)

Although the findings in the study in this thesis highlight some positive examples of working with young, socially excluded, fathers the knowledge base remains largely unexplored, particularly in relation to exploring their constructions of situations and the variety of young men who are young fathers.

As this study has indicated, the process of conducting research with disadvantaged young fathers can be problematic. Indeed, there is considerable evidence from both the literature reviewed in this thesis and the findings of this study that some socially excluded, young men describe themselves as having engaged in antisocial behaviour and 'fighting and fucking' (Mac An Ghail 1994) as a phase in their lives. Moreover, there will also continue to be groups of young men who will never be 'dickhead achievers' (Mac An Ghail 1994) and who will be excluded from school, leave with few qualifications and find it difficult to locate employment. However, as the young men in this study have described when the 'fighting and fucking' (Mac An Ghail 1994) results in fatherhood, it is interesting to note that some want to distance themselves from previous anti-social behaviour and construct themselves positively. The data generated by some of the interviews in this study has indicated that many want to re-construct their lives positively, and present themselves as caring, responsible fathers who are involved in their children's lives. A key challenge for professionals is to channel this described responsibility and harness ongoing dependability and involvement.

The young men in this study described the skills and strategies they employed in their generally complex and fragmented families to renegotiate their identities as young fathers in a largely positive way and to mend and forge new relationships. I would argue that

professionals have an ongoing task to employ this representation and explore further their constructions and work with them positively as individuals, acknowledging that some of them will be both risks and resources (Featherstone 2001). Although traditional parenting classes offer practical skills to being a parent, what young fathers may additionally need is help with communication and negotiation skills with critical relationships, people in their own social and familial networks, sometimes their own estranged parents as well as their partner's families, who may be initially hostile or suspicious of them. In addition, they may also need a forum to just 'be male' and to discuss their own concerns and contributions to their families in a masculine and relaxed environment.

As this final episode with Luke portrays, describing going with his partner to the scan of his unborn baby, sometimes fatherhood is the one positive event that has happened in their lives and this needs to be harnessed:

Luke: She said I had a great big grin on my face and because there's like a telly on the corner of the wall and shows you the thing, I had a big grin on my face, she said I have.

Jane: What did you feel like?

Luke: *Happy.*

7.4. Implications for future research

This study has focused on the stories that socially excluded, young men have told about the transition to fatherhood. It has also concentrated on the use of a narrative methodology with these young men. The findings of this study, outlined above, pose further questions which can be taken forward to future research. Specifically, in relation to young fathers all the participants used in this research were white and it would be interesting to identify and replicate this study with young men from differing cultural backgrounds, particularly in relation to whether pregnancy and young parenthood is constructed problematically by them and their families, either inside or outside of marriage¹. Also, as previously stated, the role a mother adopts when her son becomes a young father would be worthy of future investigation, particularly in the light of the perceived importance of a mother when her daughter becomes pregnant (Tabberer *et al* 2000).

In addition, as I highlighted in Chapter Four, of importance to this study has been the process of the research and it would be of value to work jointly with gatekeepers analysing more explicitly how 'appropriate' participants are selected and evaluating how some young men may never be suitable participants, perhaps due to the risks they present. The findings in this study also lend themselves to analysing further the impact that the gender, class and ethnicity of the researcher and the interviewing style has on narrative interviews with socially excluded young fathers, looking closely at the impact

¹ At the time of writing the author has recently conducted narrative interviews with young black fathers in the US.

researchers with differing biographical influences may have on the construction and knowledge generated. In addition, using narrative techniques with both young parents, perhaps interviewed together, may offer rich data. Finally, one further progression from interviewing parents who are users of social services is the obvious link to interviewing their growing children on their perceptions of their parents, particularly their fathers and the ways they describe them contributing to their lives.

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APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL PROFILES OF THE YOUNG MEN INTERVIEWED

The profiles have been drawn up using reflections from my research diary, information from the social worker and the information is supplied by the young men during the interview. The ages in brackets relate to the age at the time of the interview, rather than the age the young man became a father.

THE YOUNG MEN NOT FATHERS -

JASON (16)

Jason at the time of the interview was attending a pupil referral unit having been previously excluded from school. He was living with his mother and step father and was taking GCSE's. He was very open about his sexual promiscuity and pregnancy 'near misses'.

HARRY (16)

He was attending a pupil referral unit having previously been excluded from school for fighting and criminal damage. He described previous convictions for burglary and, at the time of the interview was 'tagged'. Harry described himself as a heavy drinker. He described living with his mother, grandmother and

grandfather. Harry described having a long term girlfriend and had a number of previous past sexual relationships

SEAN (16)

Also at the time of the interview Jason was attending a pupil referral unit following school exclusions. He describes liv with his mum and dad and describes himself as having a long term girlfriend. He describes having had one 'near miss' regarding a pregnancy.

THE YOUNG MEN REFERRED TO IN THE STUDY

1) SHAUN (19)

Shaun described himself as having a criminal background. At the time of the interview his partner was eight months pregnant with Shaun's child. His partner was described by the family social worker as having had two children from a previous relationship taken into care and, at the time of the interview, the children were living in foster care. Shaun tells of past domestic violence between himself and his partner for which he was recently bound over to keep the peace. He describes himself as having had a drinking problem in the past. Shaun was not in employment.

2) MARK (18)

Mark was described to me by his social worker as having learning disabilities. At the time of the interview he was living with his partner and young son who was described as having severe physical disabilities as well as learning difficulties. Mark and his partner had recently lost a baby when the life support machine was turned off. At the time of the interview his partner was pregnant again. Mark was not working, but expressed that he would like to go in the forces.

3) ADAM (16)

Adam was interviewed whilst in police custody. He was awaiting a sentence in magistrate's court for a number of car related crimes. His baby daughter had been born the previous day and he had not yet had the opportunity of seeing her. Adam describes that his parents are separated and his mother has re-married. His father is a policeman. Adam has spent time in care as his mother was described by him as not being able look after him.

4) ANDY (21)

He was described by his social worker as having learning and sight disabilities and as being registered disabled. At the time of the interview he was living with his partner and baby daughter (aged 9 months) in a two roomed bed-sit. His

daughter was on the at risk register. His partner was described by Andy as being older than him and having had five previous children, by another partner, all of whom were taken into care and adopted. His partner is currently pregnant again with Andy's second child.

5) DANIEL (18)

Daniel was living with his father and his two older brothers. He has a baby girl who lives with his partner and her parents. Daniel also describes fathering a child when he was 14 with another young woman and at the time of the interview he described having no contact with this child. Daniel describes working with his father and anticipated moving in with his girlfriend and baby in the near future. Daniel has previous criminal convictions and is involved with the Youth Offending Team.

6) DWAYNE (17)

At the time of the interview he was living with his partner, baby and partner's grandmother following falling out with his mother and step father. He described that he would soon be starting work with his father as a bricklayer. Dwayne has past criminal offences, and is involved with the Youth Offending Team.

7) JOHN (17)

John was placed into care at the age of 7 by his mother following living with a variety of 'aunts' and foster carers as well as in residential homes. John described himself as previously having serious drug and drink problems. He has been to a Young Offenders Institution for four months for criminal damage and carrying an offensive weapon. At the time of the interview he was living on his own in a bed sit, but seeing his partner and baby every day. His baby was months old. John was not working but was aiming to go to college in the near future. He was also on a supervision order to the Youth Offending Team.

8) JAY (19)

Jay lives on his own in a two bed roomed flat. His partner and 3 month old baby live nearby with her parents. His partner and baby were required to move by social services following the birth of his child, when Jay went to social services asking for help. He described himself as not coping with the lack of sleep and the stress caused by the baby. Jay and his partner met in a hostel as they were both living away from their families. Jay, at the time of the interview, was not working.

9) MANUEL (22)

Man lives with his partner and two children, aged two and three, in a council house, in an area described as having high social exclusion. Man suffers from ill health and has serious breathing difficulties and it was quite hard to hear and

understand him during the interview. Man is not working and is unsure if he will be able to return to work in the near future.

10) KEITH (19)

Keith lives in his parents three bed roomed house with his partner and baby, his brother's partner and baby, his elder brother, who he describes as a heroin addict, and others. Keith is on an order to the Probation Service for his criminal offences and he has spent time in Youth Offending Institutions. At the time of the interview Keith was not working.

11) BEN (19)

Ben and his partner, at the time of the interview were living in a ground floor flat in a particularly problematic housing estate, where crime rates, drug use and prostitution are above average. Ben describes being recently attacked in his own home. The family centre on the estate has recently had to close due to fears for staff safety. Ben and his partner have a baby who is on the Child Protection Register and they are currently expecting their second child.

12) PETER (24)

At the time of the interview Peter was living with his partner and child in a council house on an estate high in social exclusion. He admits to using drugs in the past and needing £60 a day to fund his habit. He describes past criminal

involvement with stealing and driving cars. Peter is not employed at the moment.

13) Paul (24)

Paul was the oldest of the fathers interviewed. At the time of the interview he had custody of his son and they were both living with his mother and father. He described having regular contact with the mother of his child, although he maintains they are not together in a relationship. His partner has lost custody of her two other children and they had recently been adopted. Peter describes having a breakdown and spending time in hospital, where he received therapy, counselling and medication. His partner's house is described as being condemned. Peter is currently not working.

14) LUKE (15)

Luke, at the time of the interview was living with his pregnant girlfriend at his father's house. His parents had separated and he has minimal contact with his mother. Luke has left school and works with his father. He anticipated that he and his girlfriend will be housed in their own right when they become parents. Luke has previous past convictions for Actual Bodily Harm and Greivous Bodily Harm but has not been in youth custody.

15) VICTOR (16)

Victor, at the time of the interview, attended a local school where he was studying for his GCSE's. He has spent time living with his sister and grandmother as his mother, a heroin addict, is in prison for heroin related crimes. His father died from a heroin overdose. Victor has been involved in drug and violence related crimes. His girlfriend, at the time of the interview was pregnant with his child and was living at home with her parents

STUART (16)

Stuart was described as having learning disabilities by his social worker. At the time of the interview he was living with his partner and two small children in a condemned house with mice and rats, which were apparent during the course of the interview. Stuart was not in employment.

APPENDIX B

THE 'AIDE MEMOIRE'

Can you tell me about your life before you became a father, the people, the places and any important and special events?

What kinds of things did you like doing?

Can you tell me about your previous relationships/girlfriends?

What about the relationship with the mother of your child. How did it begin?

Tell me about when she found out that she was pregnant, what was it like for you?

What happened during the pregnancy/at the birth?

Tell me about after the birth

Can you take me through a typical day? A nice day, a not so nice day?

How are important decisions made about the children?

How important is being a father to you?

How does this compare to your own parents?

Tell me how social services have been involved since the birth of your child.

APPENDIX C – CONTACT LETTER

**The Open University,
Walton Hall,
Milton Keynes,
Northampton.
MK7 6AA**

Date

Dear

I am carrying out research on the experiences of being a young father. I have been given your name by *** who is a social worker in the **** team in *****. I understand that he/she has spoken to you and that you may be interested in talking with me.**

As she/he may have explained the interview will last about an hour and I will be asking you questions on your past experiences and on your feelings about becoming a father.

If you are interested in being interviewed would you please return the slip below in the envelope as soon as possible. I will then 'phone you and arrange a time to come and see you.

I look forward to hearing from you,

**Jane Reeves
Research Student,
The Open University.**

Name:.....

I can see you on (date)

Best time:.....

Phone no:.....

APPENDIX E: PART OF THE NARRATIVE INTERVIEW WITH PAUL

Jane: Ok. So how did you meet?

Paul: We worked together. I used to work at G***** (place) at erm ... ? importers. We opened a branch at L****, and I went to help run it, unofficially, I was always ... always basically second in charge, never had the authority or money that covered what I would do. I went up there, and she came in as a cutter, and we got talking, and I asked her out. And ... at the time she was getting divorced, and still living with her husband who was an absolute ... nightmare, a very horrible person. He is not nice to anybody. He was being particularly horrible to her. And I think at first I felt really sorry for her, and she came and moved in with me, which was quite soon after we got together. She got pregnant first of all, it wasn't planned, but I was happy because I have always wanted kids, never ... never actually got round to settling down. One person I did settle down and wanted kids with, had all the business of getting ready to get married, and ... we got engaged and the marriage was planned for about nine months after we engaged, and three months after we got engaged we had all the wedding plans sorted out, and she said to me 'our relationship isn't going anywhere' and I said 'pardon?' and she said 'our relationship isn't going anywhere' and I said 'we are getting married in six months, and then we are planning on having kids, and are in the process of buying a house. So what do you mean our relationship isn't going anywhere?' and she said 'it isn't going anywhere' and so I said 'are we splitting up or what?' and she said 'yes, be gone'. So I went 'oh right, oh'.

Jane: So with Lisa you said it wasn't planned?

Paul: No. Alex wasn't planned, it was sort of an accident. Erm ... I was quite happy actually, I was happy with it. Erm ... and when he came along I was absolutely thrilled.

Jane: So what happened to Lisa's other two children then?

Paul: Erm, well ... they had a very nasty custody battle. And for quite a while they lived with us, because basically the solicitor said ... he refused to let her have access. She had a letter from the solicitor saying if she didn't have access the court would be brought into it, and the court would grant her immediate custody, because she had already been ? by the judge. And, we get access, when they came down we had a letter from the solicitor saying 'whatever you do, do not let them go home. Social services are investigating him, this, that and other. You cannot get involved because of this reason, and that reason'. We had this really long list of reasons why they couldn't go back. So they didn't go back until about a month before we actually went to court for residency. And then Lisa got silly. Because he came to visit them in my house, on our grounds. He wasn't allowed to take them away. We had this letter saying all this stuff, and ? and our solicitor basically ignored them. Neither of you can ...he can't run off with them and all this lot. And erm ...

one weekend he came down and he said to ... he conned Lisa into letting him take them up to see his mum in M***** (place) because that is where they all lived, so he came to G***** to M***** (places). He went up to M***** (place), and that was the last we saw of him before we went to court. When we went to court he made out that they had been with him totally, lots of lies were said, my character was completely destroyed, erm ... Lisa's character was completely destroyed, her family was ... her grandmother had cancer at one point, and they turned around and said she was never in remission. They absolutely used every nasty move that they could. Finally the judge was then told by our solicitor and their solicitor to come in the last day of court, and said 'look we want to make this agreement before we go into court' and I said 'why?' 'because we know we have lost'. Next thing I know she has come out of court in tears, and I said 'why are you crying?' and she said 'we have lost custody of the kids' and I said 'why?' and the solicitor looked at me and said 'I cannot tell you' and I said 'what do you mean you can't tell me? I don't understand it'. Her solicitor walked up to our solicitor and spoke to them and got off ... Afterwards, or many months afterwards, I was talking to a friend and said 'give me the judge's name' and I said 'why?' and they said 'I just want to know the judge's name' and he turned around and told us that unofficially at the time he was head of the local masons, and this judge was a mason, so ... her ex-husband's stepfather and father, and his stepfather was head of the masons order this judge was on. So without being able to prove anything, it was ... a secret handshake job.

Jane: So how were things after that? What happened?

Paul: Appalling. The kids would come down for the minimum time, two weekends out of a month, and half the holidays. That lasted for about four months, and then Mick booked it down when he liked. And I said to Lisa 'come on, you need to get it sort out with the solicitor, he is breaking court order, get it sorted, and get back in court over it'. But Lisa wouldn't. She would say 'we are getting access, we are getting access'. Alex came along and Mick said 'oh you need a couple of weeks off of the kids coming down' and Lisa said 'yes' because she wasn't coping very well when Alex was born. She suffered with post natal depression, quite badly at first. Also three of four days before Alex was born, her grandmother died, and she was incredibly close to her grandmother than her mum or dad. So her grandmother was part of that support network at the time. Losing the kids was something that ... made her grandmother quite weak, the cancer came back and killed her. It was quite devastating for her, and for me because I had only known the grandmother for a short time really, and I loved her to pieces, she was a lovely woman. After that things went down hill.

Jane: Are you alright?

Paul: Yes, I am ok. After ... the kids stopped coming down for a while, then we got them back and then bits and pieces all kicked off, and Mick stopped them coming down for months on end. And erm ... it got very much that Lisa couldn't cope with things, and I became a full time dad, full time working.