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"It was like being torn apart"

The experiences of young men who become fathers while at school. A critical interpretive analysis of discourses of young fatherhood.

A thesis

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study that reports the experiences of a sample of five participants, young men who became fathers while still at school. I talked to these young men about their personal stories which relate their personal introspection on interactions with institutions and relationships with people in their lives, set within a socially constructed reality that positions young men who become fathers in a certain way. Discourse and hegemony are collaborative constructive processes that shape and sculpt the conditions of the lives of everyone and it is the intention of this study to illuminate the workings of particular discourses in the context of these young men's lives.

This research is interested in how or whether the assumptions underpinning the socially dominating discourses of youth, gender, marriage and family were reflected in the participants' experiences. The study aims to critique this social situation, which assumes immaturity when it comes to the experiences of young men who father children while still at school. The invisibility of these young men's experiences in the current research literature as well as in society generally, except in pejorative ways, brings focus upon both the research landscape and the lens that is being looked through.

It is not the intention of this research to make sweeping statements or to pretend that the findings of the study represent the findings of all who have an experience similar to the participants'. What this enquiry does intend to achieve is to bring alive the humanity of five personal stories of real people and shed light on the processes that played a part in their construction.

The importance of the research is to gain a greater understanding of and insight into the experiences of these young men and what the reality is for them as they see it.

PREFACE

I always wanted to have kids. Having children just seems like such a natural thing to do. I didn't want them turning up at the wrong time though. I was in my thirties when I fathered my first child. I had left school, completed an apprenticeship, travelled around overseas, met someone special, returned and had babies. Now the eldest of those babies is working and travelling overseas as the other two complete schooling. The children's mother and I separated almost six years ago and according to the tax department I am what is known as a non-custodial parent. My own schooling involved School Certificate level achievement at various provincial high schools and led via a career in Engineering to a Social Science degree and eventually training as a high school teacher.

I was motivated to undertake part time study at postgraduate level because I felt I wanted more in depth knowledge about people that I encountered in my daily working duties as a teacher. This particular study was prompted by my own experiences as a Dean at a New Zealand High School. In the course of my work I have met young men who seem to just drop out or disappear from sight once they have found out that they have fathered a child. Becoming a father while still at school is a major event in a young man's life, demanding a response while bringing change in him and others. Good, bright young men were disappearing off the school map. The time came when the opportunity to undertake the study as part of a Master's degree in Education became available to me and as my partner pointed out this was the area of interest that I kept returning to and seemed passionate about. This research also serves to further my own experience, understanding and professional development in working with young people and particularly young men as well as furthering my understanding of the experience of being a father and a man.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND

It is not easy being a parent at any age. It is certainly not easy being a young parent, whether male or female, straight, gay or from whatever social class, religious or ethnic background.

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in the OECD. In 2009 alone there were 4,670 children born to teenagers, 2,251 of whom the father were known to be under 20. The Ministry of Social Development (2010) regards teen pregnancy as a "poor life choice with long lasting effects on the socio economic well-being of the women and children involved." Whether you are a government agency or a researcher taking on a research area you put your resources and energies into areas you identify as worthwhile, hold of value and think important. The Ministry of Education concedes "there is very little research into teen fathers" (2010). "Regarded as deadbeat fathers and 'no hopers'" (Ministry of Social Development, 2010, p. 5) the fact that teenage fathers have not until recently been identified as fitting the criteria for possible research funding is reflective of the ideas and values of past and present society expressed through the priorities of various government agencies.

Adolescent fatherhood has become "associated with negative stereotyping and deficiencies" (Frewin, Tuffin & Rouch, 2007, p. 161) and "stereotyped as negligent and irresponsible" (Winstanley, Meyers & Dorsheim, 2002, p. 93). Some of these stereotypes surfaced at a social gathering I attended in the early stages of the research. When I said what my research topic was, it was suggested my study is solely aimed at scamming a trip to Australia to do the interviews as that is where all the fathers are, "you'll be off to Australia then to interview the fathers" (much laughter over the barbeque); young fathers were seen as fleeing their obligations. Further comments strengthen the impression that young fathers are thought of as of poor character, such as when I told a work colleague of the topic of this study and the reply was "what do you want to talk to those dirt bags

for?" These experiences brought home to me the depth of feeling and sorts of attitudes faced by these young men and the context within which they must find a way to exist. I began to wonder what their crime was. I was forced to look at the sorts of things I thought may contribute to these stereotypes such as the ideas behind attitudes towards fathers and youth and young males.

This research is interested in looking at what lies behind the stereotypes and seeing to what degree these ideas were reflected in the experiences of the participants of the study. The more understanding we have of these young men and their needs, then the greater chance we have to identify opportunities in which to engage teenage fathers with their learning, and the potential for personal development and positive social outcomes that the experience of fathering a child presents. With that in mind this study ultimately has an aim to, as Klein and Myers (1999) put it, "be emancipatory in that it has an intention to help eliminate the causes of unwarranted alienation and domination, and thereby enhance the opportunities for realizing human potential" (p. 68). My investigation hopes to achieve this by shedding some light on the experiences by using "exposure through publication as its method of intervention" (Willig, 1999, p. 11). There is a problem here, these young men are either invisible, or they seem to be "dirt bags."

The research data itself consists of an exploration of the dominant discourses and investigates how these discourses impact on the experiences of our participants as related through a series of narratives taken from semi structured or unstructured interviews. The young men were asked to tell their stories and describe in their own words how the experience of becoming a father while still at school has been for them.

1.2   THE DISCOURSES

It is not the event itself that is the major player in the drama around a teenage pregnancy; it is the encompassing discourses that determine the nature of the experience and the possible outcomes.

The research uses two key theoretical concepts to help analyse the experiences of young men who become fathers while still at school: the ideas of *discourse* and *hegemony*. These concepts form part of the meta-narrative of the young men's lives, in that they are big picture processes that shape the conditions in which young fathers must engage *as* young fathers with society in their everyday lives. The reverse also applies in that the processes that are discourse and hegemony are features that both shape and are shaped by society. If not beyond the influence of the individual then certainly beyond the control of the individual, the processes of discourse and hegemony operate at such a level as to become inherent, almost invisible, and normal.

According to Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 2) the "things that make up the world - including our very identities- appear out of discourse." We create identities in relation to others and discourse is a factor of the ways we communicate with those others. The term discourse is associated with the use of language and as Woodilla (1998) says "in general terms, refers to actual practices of talking and writing" (as cited in Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3). In this study discourse is taken to provide a focus on the links that "involve patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language" (Johnstone, 2008, p. 3). Silent assumptions of belief guide habitual action create a sense of normalcy and inform the experience of all people, let alone young fathers.

Discourses can also be thought about as various statements that fit together to take form as a greater dialogue that carries with it "sets of systematic assumptions about the way the world should be" (Parker,1992 as cited in Drewery,2005 ,p. 313), and that "reflect interwoven sets of power relations"(Drewery, 2005, p. 313). In this way people take up roles, behaviour and actions according to what they understand about the underlying values and meanings that correspond with those roles. Discourse has also been described as "a loose network of terms of reference which *construct* a particular version of events and which *position* subjects in relation to these events" (Willig, 1999, p. 2). In this process of positioning, people are offered roles that they either accept or not. "The act of positioning thus refers to the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions

intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts" (Harré & van Lagenhove, 1999, p. 16).

The way that we use language in written or oral communication in everyday interactions offers people positions or roles to take up which then carries with it assumptions and parameters for possible outcomes. For example, the following statements can be read very differently.

(i)   I am depressed
(ii)   I suffer from depression
(iii)   I battle with depression

The first statement implies the individual is in some state they are responsible for; the second statement positions the sufferer as victim of a disorder, deserving of sympathy and offering the position of sympathizer, while the third has the person positioned as a hero battling a heinous foe and offering the position not of sympathizer but of supporter. Each rewording creates a different perception of a reality eliciting a different response. "Theorists use positioning theory to help us think about how we come to take up certain identities and not others" (Drewery, 2005, p. 306), for example an identity of victim or battler responded to by a sympathizer or supporter. Whether and how the position offered is taken up is not predicted with certainty due to the layers of human experience and meaning making.

The broader definition offered by Blommaert (2005), where discourse is seen not just as written and oral language but as "meaningful symbolic behaviour in any medium" (as cited in Johnstone, 2008, p. 2), more fully encapsulates the holistic nature of human experience and links communication with behaviour. Stepping outside the limitations of written and oral text as primary communication, some argue (Parker, 1999) "that discourse may be studied wherever there is meaning and may include visual (e.g. flags, comics) and physical (e.g. cities, bodies) texts" (as cited in Willig, 1999, p. 3). That would mean everything from uniforms, colours, and hair styles can be part of discourse, so too is the meaning of things such as carvings, statues, monuments and tattoos. More than just words contribute to the shaping of reality; symbols, actions, non-actions, and even geography play their part in building the whole picture. As Foucault suggested, discourses

systematically form the objects of which they speak (as cited in Drewery, 2005, p. 313). In this research we look at the various discourses and how they inform the experience of the participants of the study or "form the [sub]jects of which they speak."

Later in this chapter the research will examine the dominant discourses that feature in the reality of the participants. Discourse analysis "focuses attention on the processes whereby the social world is constructed and maintained" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p.2). As social critique, discourse analysis uses "exposure through publication as its method of intervention" (Willig, 1999, p. 11). Drawing attention to the experiences of the participants via exposure through publication is one of the main motivations for this study. Critical discourse analysis studies the way "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk and social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 352). The narratives as presented later in this study will be analysed with a view to looking for just such "an action, reproduction and resistance" in the context of participants' experiences. The study will consider how reproduction of social discourse as the normal, common sense, default position becomes embedded, and succeeds in marginalizing the voices of the alternatives. Social hegemony is the process where the values and cultural practices of the (usually) dominating group in a society become embedded in thought and positioned as natural, normal or logical in such a way that they become unquestioned. In doing so they push aside, deny or discredit the possibilities of the other.

1.3 GENDER

Take a quick glance at the changing roles of gender over the last century and it becomes clear there is no fixed way of being but instead a consistent re invention of gender roles. Those actions of reproducing the tasks deemed appropriate for the gender role invite a correspondingly gendered response. A central point in the discussion on gender is that gender needs to be viewed as "a process in which all people partake on a daily basis" (Connell, 1995, in Law, Campbell & Dolan, 1999, p. 154). Social transactions in everyday life constantly renegotiate our positioning in gender roles. Those social transactions are also an expression of the

power dynamics that exist within the cultural framework they are located in. Notions to do with family, gender, youth, fathers and adolescent fatherhood are created and re-created and are part of and subject to the on-going construction of the social reality. Women and men interact in the ways that they do because of ideas about masculinity and femininity that they adopt from their cultural and familial background. The obvious biological details may physically differentiate the sexes but the ideas about the responsibilities that make a woman a woman and a man a man change over historical time. The drama of change is played out in a socially constructed reality where men and women are positioned in what are called gender roles. Gender roles have been described as "what men and women actually do in a given culture in a given historical era" (Bjorkland, 2009, p. 135). It follows then that the social transaction of parenting roles of fatherhood and motherhood would be informed by this fluid context of socially constructed gendered relationships. Aside from the obvious biological limitations there is not much of parenting that need be gender specific. Claiborne and Drewery (2010) argue that "in general research tells us that fathers are able to be just as protective and nurturing as mothers" (p. 56).

1.4   HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

There have been many reasons to marry somebody in the past but love has hardly been one of them. One of the most widespread ideas about the origins of marriage was that it evolved as a means of protection for women (Koontz, 2006). The idea is that women were committed to the duties of child rearing, and are therefore vulnerable and in need of protection through an alliance with a male who can do that. But a male will only provide and protect what they see as their own. This is called the protector or provider theory of marriage, where the male protects the woman and offspring from roving predators and provides meat from hunting in exchange for sexual exclusivity and some fruit and berries. Despite tidily presenting a nuclear family synchronicity that tempts the palate, this notion has been described as a "myth …rejected by most palaeontologists" (Koontz, 2006, p. 34). It seems survival was more a team effort than the provider theory portrays.

The establishment and development of cooperative relationships between families and communities has been called the "single most important function of marriage through most of history" (Koontz, 2005, p. 31). In the past I might have married someone not because I loved them but because my father wanted his goats or my family's goats to graze on that person's father's land. Someone may have married me so that their family could collect shellfish from our bay or timber from the hinterland. Some see things differently and describe marriage as a tool for the oppression and exploitation of women, where women were used "as a means of forging alliances among men and perpetuating their 'line'"(Koontz, 2005, p. 42).

In the process social and political alliances and understandings are formed and reinforced around blood connections of kinship between groups of people. Here in Aotearoa/New Zealand a person of Māori descent may cite their whakapapa, often more a family forest than a family tree, that will locate the connections that person has with various other kinship groups established through marriages. In the past, knowledge of recalled ancestry may have proved crucial for survival, as identifying as a member of certain family groups could mean entitlement to the rights of members of those groups.

Seldom in history has love been seen as the main reason for marriage. In fact, in some cultures and times "true love was actually thought to be incompatible with marriage "(Koontz, 2005, p. 16). Too strong and unpredictable was the emotion of love that it was not seen as a sound basis on which to base something as important as marriage. That doesn't mean that people in the past haven't been in love or experienced love. The idea of marrying for love is a recent indulgence. In Western European society it was not until the "end of the 1700s that personal choice of partners had replaced arranged marriage as a social ideal" (Koontz, 2005, p. 146) and individuals were encouraged to marry for love. Issues of resources and suitability still informed the choice of marriage partner as did the hegemonic power of parents, family and social discourse. In the centuries of human history up until then "It would have been inconceivable for people to choose their mates on something as fragile and irrational as love" (Koontz, 2006, p. 15).

The dominant discourse of marriage in New Zealand society is that a heterosexual man and woman by consent get married to someone they are not closely related

to, on a basis determined by the modern western interpretation of marriage and the concept of love. The modern assumption is that two people know each other, are similar ages and have a bond as a loving couple who are able to live together in an exclusive intimate relationship and financially independent household. Once married they wear the titles and roles assigned to their gender embedded within the hegemony of the time and create a home in which they are able to afford to raise the fruits of their heterosexual sex lives, become mum and dad and have children. Different generations of the family live in their own households with primary care of children, who are the responsibility of the immediate parents. It is tempting to think that these are embedded frameworks of living that have just not kept up with changing times but the fact is people have always lived realities outside the confines of the accepted default position of the heterosexual marriage discourse, and always will. Long term, committed relationships between same sex couples are quite common today, yet so entrenched is the heterosexual hegemony in this country that when two people of the same gender wish to commit to each other in the manner of a contract of marriage they have to settle for something called a Civil Union.

The discourse of heterosexual marriage impacts directly on a young father in the way that it gives a prescription for the role of a father. The pressure on men to step up and fulfil the roles required of a father come from a discourse that positions the father in such a way as to be held liable for his actions (participating in consensual sex that resulted in pregnancy) and having an obligation to the child and mother. It is the responsibilities associated with that role and the perceived ability of a young father to meet them that form the hegemonic parameters that inform their experience of becoming a father while still at school. If the discourse was different perhaps then the consequences and outcomes for young fathers may be different.

1.5   FATHERS

This classic American proverb passes comment on the differentiation of the roles of biological father and socially constructed fatherhood: "*Maternity is a matter of fact; paternity is a matter of opinion*" (Mead, 2012). This aphorism neatly if rather

bluntly expressing the duality that is present in the experience of a father. It is clear that becoming a father has the ability to change a man but is it what makes you a man? Masculinity has long been linked to fatherhood. There was a time in history when you were not regarded as a man unless you were a property owner. It didn't matter how many children you had sired. There were also times when children and women as family were regarded as a man's property. The link between the role of fatherhood as a means of defining ways that masculinity can be expressed and what it means to "be a man" is very powerful. Fatherhood offers the opportunity for a man to participate in a socially reinforced forum where he has a role where he can safely express and grow his own loving, caring and nurturing qualities that may not otherwise have a means of expression. "The key for men is to be fathers, the key for children is to have fathers. The key for society is to create fathers"(Blankenhorn, 1995, p. 26). I was in my thirties when I became a father. Even at that age I felt as though I was now a real 'grown up'. I remember standing at the end of the cot with the mother of the child totally transfixed with wonder at what we had created. This is an exploration of the notion of fatherhood and what it means to be a father. Fatherhood is different for all men and can have a powerful on a man's aspirations and world view . Some have gone as far as to call fatherhood "the most important contrivance for shaping male identity" (Blankenhorn, 1995, p. 65). How can it not shape your identity when you live subject to the demands of change and all the trappings of expectation that go with having a baby and the discourse of fatherhood. It is little wonder that since cutting as close as to the bone the very identity of a man is at stake that he will sometimes wonder if the child is his. I know it's going to sound like classic male paranoia but a woman never ponders am I the mother? But that is a question many a father has thought. Aside from a DNA test, a father has only an act of faith as the mother's assurance he is the father. She and everyone will assume they know she is the mother because the baby is visible as inside her body and a biological and emotional reality. Fatherhood however is invisible as an experience and a biological phenomenon, and it is contestable as an emotional reality. This is an exposure of the duality of the experience of biologically fathering a child and that of being a socially constructed father experiencing fatherhood. While motherhood may be seen as a biological necessity, if not a necessity, surely fatherhood today is at least a biological preference. Like

fatherhood, motherhood is also a social invention. The physical reality of bearing a child sits alongside the non-physical demands and responsibilities of a mother as shaped by the discourses around not only parenting and family but the presumed role of being a woman. Women who fly in the face of a discourse that sees the bearing and caring for children as a primary role of a woman encounter a deep seated frame of hegemonic social thought. By upsetting the status quo and consciously choosing not to have children, or by perpetrating acts against children, women face an especially harsh reaction as they seemingly defy nature and the natural role of earth mother assigned by the discourse to the gendered role.

Although parenthood for women and the role of mother/carer is relatively clear, the role of the father is less certain and can vary due to the social or cultural context within which it is located. In discussions about men meeting responsibilities there is an assumption that a man who has fathered a child has an obligation to the mother and the child. Across much of the western world "there seems to be broad agreement that men who father children out of marriage share an obligation to support them financially" (Sheldon, 2003, p. 176). With a logic that flows along the lines of you created this mouth, now you have to feed and clothe it, the father's obligation to a child is based around the notion of the "voluntary creation of needs" (Sheldon, 2003, p. 177). This idea reflects the assumption that all actions are intentional, including fathering, and this discourse is at the root of the commonly accepted liability for obligations of child support. At a minimum those needs include care, development and financial support a young person needs to grow. By knowingly having sex a man is thus deemed by implication to have given consent to meet those obligations of need should they arise as a result of a pregnancy. He is deemed responsible irrespective of whether he has taken responsibility for his own protection from such an eventuality via contraception. The reality is, people have sex for a variety of reasons, not just to make babies. There is a world of difference between having sex with someone and wanting to have a baby with that person. "In agreeing to have sex, sexual partners do not necessarily agree to procreate" (Sheldon, 2003, p. 180). It's a tough draw to be getting pregnant or fathering a child when you don't mean to.

Fatherhood is not some fixed role that has existed forever. A constant, lived redefining of the terms of fatherhood goes on in the daily activities of society. Historically the roles and the rights, obligations and status accorded to fathers continue to change. A look at some of the ways that fatherhood has been manifested historically will further illustrate the socially constructed nature of the role and the rights, obligations and status accorded to Fathers over time. In the past centuries the model European father has been the "stern patriarch, moral guide and disciplinarian, bending or breaking the child's will to the required norms "(McCann, 1999). This is far from the ideal of model fatherhood promoted today (Biddulph, 1997; Pudney & Cottrell, 1998).

Each man's experience of fatherhood is his own. Every generation and every culture interprets what is the father's role differently. Some argue that throughout history the commitment of men to fatherhood has acted as a civilizing force (Blankenhorn, 1995), giving a man a reason to look beyond himself. Some reflect a discourse to a "new role in the world. It (fatherhood) sensitizes us to the condition of all children. Fathering is everywhere. It calls us to the principle of kaitiakitanga, the guardianship of living things around us. We are guardians of not only our tamariki but of the wider community" (Birks & Callister, 1999, p. 62). The role of father is cast alongside reciprocal roles such as child and mother, uncle, nana, social worker in a drama that is played out on a socially constructed stage. Clear indicators of what the role of father entails and the tasks that need to be performed are important for all men who become fathers to set their bearings.

To successfully fulfil the duties of the role a father also needs to know the expectations of the role and its parameters. For an adolescent father this is particularly acute. They need an understanding of the specific cues needed to perform a role. For example in the time since European settling of New Zealand and Australia four key roles of fatherhood were identified as the irreplaceable caregiver, moral educator, head of the family and sole breadwinner (Blankenhorn, 1995). For a man in this country these are the criteria that he must strive to attain if he wants others to call him a good father and by implication a good man. For some young men, stepping up to the perceived criteria for becoming a father can be a life changing experience, with profound implications of thought and action.

In this manner a baby can be an agent of change. "Becoming a dad has kept me out of trouble a lot. Like instead of being out there like you know boy racing and being an idiot, I'm here at home and yeah, learning about being a dad, and helping baby Emma learn things" (Rouch, 2005, p. 51)**.** For many men becoming a father allows them the opportunity to reflect on their own upbringing and examples of fathering they may have encountered.

1.6   YOUTH

In the city where I live the council has installed a sound system to the cost of NZD27,000 in a space in the city centre, with an aim to use "music as a weapon" (Waikato Times, 2011). Armed with a playlist of Vivaldi, Mozart and Barry Manilow , the council hopes to discourage "anti-social behaviour and loitering" by "groups of kids who hang around shouting obscenities, playing rough sports that interfere with customers and also sitting in spaces that are normally reserved for customers" (Waikato Times, 2011).

The city councillors and business community leaders join a long line of much quoted white men such as Plato, Socrates and Shakespeare as viewing the behaviour of youth as "problematic" (Coleman & Hagell, 2007 p.3) and perpetuating what Claiborne and Drewery (2010) call a "well recognized negative view" (p. 216). One can only imagine what young people thought of Plato or Shakespeare, as youth historically had no voice. Even today the voice of young people is seldom taken seriously. There have always been young people and there has always been puberty but the life stage we call adolescence is "relatively new" (Claiborne & Drewery, 2010, p. 210). Adolescence has been described as a stage of life and one that is "now a longer and more prominent part of the life-cycle". (Gluckman, 2010, p. 2). Others have called it "a stage of development "(Coleman & Hagell, 2007, p. 3) and a "social process and transitional state of life" (White & Wyn, 2008, p. 8).

The way that our society shapes the existence of young people presupposes a knowing on the part of adult wisdom and a lacking or deficit of knowing in the young. This state of being has given adulthood "the status of the ideal and marks

out adulthood as the self-fulfilling person, the final result of development" (MacLeod, 2003, p. 43), complete and competent. This implies that the adult, as the person whom the adolescent is not, "is knowledgeable, fully self-aware, capable of 'mature' decision-making, able to reason in a linear, logical fashion, takes responsibility for her or his individual actions, and is reliable" (Sampson, 1990, p. 117) and the young person is not.

The concept of transition lies at the centre of my study and has been a dominant discourse on youth over the last decade (Wyn & Dwyer, 2000, p. 148) and is a feature in any discussion of adolescence and the experiences of young men who become fathers while still at school. Wyn & White (1997) have described adolescence as a "social process" (p. 11) and **"**a transitional state of life" (White & Wyn, 2008, p. 8). I cannot recall an exact moment when I felt an adult, more a growing series of events. I do remember the first time someone called me a man, I was buying sweets at the time. "Transitions are often signalled by events such as leaving school, leaving home, (coming out), getting married, having children or getting a job" (Wyn, 1997, p. 96). It is the learning from an event exactly like that which the participants of this study have experienced that serve to give a person a history and a context - and these experiences have "real and substantial consequences for one's interpersonal relationships as well as one's own personal mind-set" (Meyerhoff, 2006, p. 8). Events such as this help you to 'grow up'. "The term transition to adulthood draws on the idea that young people make one transition to adulthood and that adulthood is a clearly defined status-a destination at which one "arrives" (Wyn, 1997, p. 9). This idea of a linear progression to adulthood is called into question by new patterns of transition that young people are fashioning to meet their needs. In the past young people have typically made a structured transition from school to work where for example there was no such thing as a "gap year" in my youth yet the concept has entered the consciousness and is an option that many young people including my daughter have taken. Teenage pregnancy may be one of those new patterns of transition. "In many cultures in the world, the transition to adulthood is marked by special ceremonies for boys and girls, called rites of passage, so from this point of view it (adolescence) is 'not a stage' at all (Drewery, & Claiborne, 2010, p. 215).

Like other concepts involving human relations the notion of transition is contestable. Most criticism centre's on the descriptive nature of the term 'transition' and the "ease with which this term is invested with implicit understandings of youth" (Cohen& Ainley, 2000; Mizen, 2002; Wyn & Woodham, 2006, as cited in Wyn & White, 2008, p. 8). Critics say these notions of young people are outdated pointing at implicit understandings of youth based on assumptions about the "life patterns of one generational group, the baby boomer generation, (who) represent the standard" (Wyn & White, 2008, p. 9). A quick calculation locates this age bracket firmly within the direct sphere of relevance for many of today's experienced researchers. "The generation who were youth in the 1970s has become normative, and it is the contemporary generation that is seen as faulty or lacking (Wyn & White, 2008, p. 8) or 'at risk'. The notion of transition in relation to youth tends to oversimplify and amalgamate what is a fluid and organic process. "The assumption of linear movement that underpins the metaphor of transition masks the reality of more complex and often chaotic processes in young people's lives" (Wyn & White, 2008, p. 9).

Cultural and contextual factors over which a young person has no control will shape the form that qualification to adulthood in that particular context takes. For example in South Africa "the construction of childhood and adolescence reflects an intertwining of Apartheid ideology, and historical and cultural practice. Civil law, customary law and initiation and other rites, among other things, construct images of and practices with regard to children, adolescents and adults" (MacLeod, 2003, p. 421).

Once while travelling in India I met some young men who described themselves as businessmen, they told me they could change money and get me whatever I wanted; they were aged barely 10 years old. Clearly adolescence was something these young men just didn't have time for, they needed to survive first. What becomes clear is that "childhood and adolescence mean different things in different contexts" (MacLeod, 2003, p. 420). "… the central issue is the contradiction that young people do share in common their age, but the social, economic and cultural significance of this physical reality is far from common" (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 24). In Māori society young people are "treasured as the

future and seen as a link between the past and the future" (Claiborne & Drewery, 2010, p. 256). The closely guarded knowledge of ancestry is central to locating a person in the structure of a whakapapa or family tree. The notion of young people representing the adults of tomorrow, which has been called "futurity" and like a "citizen in training" (Wyn & White, 2008, p. 103), positions a young person as on a linear journey to becoming an adult. MacLeod (2003) refers to 'adolescence' as only having meaning in relation to 'adult' and 'child' and that "without these there is no meaning to adolescence" (p. 424). Young people are assumed to not be able to know their own minds, and as risk takers not to be trusted to make decisions in their best interests, and therefore in need of monitoring and intervention when judged by an adult authority to be at risk. Adolescents live in a state of "uncertainty about status and role" (Coleman & Hagell, 2007, p. 3). On everything from access to health services, sex, drugs and alcohol, firearm and vehicle licensing and minimum wages, young people have faced a "high degree of ambiguity both for the individual and for the society in terms of how an adolescent should be evaluated in a particular situation" (Gluckman, 2010, p. 23). "Almost everyone seems to have an opinion about what young people should be like, how they should behave and when they should be allowed to participate as full members of society"(Claiborne & Drewery, 2010, p. 216). That is why some, such as Tait (1995), have described adolescence and youth as "an artifact formed and reformed as a category of various forms of government" (p. 14). This approach to the concept of youth is responsible for the positioning of young people as requiring guidance and expert attention (from professionals) to ensure that the process of becoming adult is conducted correctly" (Wyn, 1997, p. 11).

The most common dilemma facing adolescents, and the one that probably causes the most conflicts with adults, is their "rolelessness" in modern society (Koontz, 1997, p. 13). I believe the issue of role is especially acute for young men who father a child while still at school. They experience what MacLeod (2003, p. 426) calls an "ambiguity of status and the failure of the childhood-adult transition." When discussing the discourse around teenage pregnancy the dominating idea is that teenage pregnancy is a mistake or rupture of the assumed life passage of a young person. MacLeod (2003) says of teenage pregnancy that "it is as though adulthood has come too soon for a person who is still seen as a child" (p. 426).

The discourse positions the teenage parent as outside of the established pathway to parenthood and adulthood and this leads to questioning of the parenting capabilities of a young person and the ability to provide for and keep a child safe. "In conceiving, the teenager displays 'adult' functions (reproduction) and disrupts the 'transitional' nature of adolescence "(MacLeod, 2003, p. 429). Sexual interaction and reproduction, the actions of an adult, are being displayed by a person who is defined by their age as supposedly a child.

"If this person is not-yet-adult then she must be a child, according to the adult/child linear progression. But this she can also not be owing to her reproductive status. The pregnant teenager is therefore adult, but not adult, child, but not child", what MacLeod (2003) has called an "undecidable"(p. 426).

When discussing the discourse around youth and pregnancy the dominating idea is that teenage pregnancy is a mistake or rupture of the assumed life passage of a young person. The discourse positions the teenage parent as outside of the established pathway to parenthood and adulthood and leads to questioning of the parenting capabilities of a young person and their ability to provide for and keep a child safe.

1.7   SUMMARY

This research is interested in how or whether these assumptions were reflected in the participants' experiences, and whether they were reflective of the discourses discussed above. The study aims to critique the status quo and by its very existence it does that. The fact that the status quo assumes immaturity when it comes to the experiences of young men who father children while still at school makes a critique of itself. We see what we see and the invisibility of these young men's experiences in the current research literature brings focus upon both the research landscape and the lens that is being looked through. It is clear that the experience of young men who father children while still at school is washed by the discourses and hegemonic ideas we have as a society about youth, gender and fatherhood.

In this chapter we have used the concepts of discourse and hegemony to examine the social expectations that affect the experiences of our participants. I have looked at the historical construction of the dominating discourses of fatherhood, marriage, family, gender and youth, and considered how these discourses inform the current social context affecting the persons interviewed for this study. In the daily going about of our lives these discourses speak to the positioning of people - and they impact upon us all, not just young fathers. Discourse and hegemony are collaborative constructive processes that shape and sculpt the conditions of the lives of everyone and it is the intention of this study to illuminate the workings of these discourses in the context of these young men's experiences. The importance of the research is to gain a greater understanding of and insight into the experiences of these young men and what the reality is for them as they see it. I anticipate that the perceptions shared will provide valuable information on how these young men have coped with change and the new reality of having fathered a child. The sources of influence that guide them in the process are significant in terms of establishing connections between what they perceive to be the reality and the ways in which they respond and how others respond to them. In learning from this study, fellow educators and others who work with youth may reflect on the way that we position people in our society, in particular teenage parents and young fathers, and how this impacts, and is impacted upon by, notions of youth, family and fatherhood.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an outline of the Research methodology and research methods used in the study. It begins with a discussion about qualitative research and the reasoning behind using qualitative research methods for this study. The chapter continues with an exploration of the notion of social construction, the processes we use to create our reality and its relationship to the research topic. Then follows a description of the research process and an outline of how we tackled the ethical issues faced in the conducting of the study.

2.2 FINDING WAYS TO UNDERTAKE QUALITATIVE STUDY

This is an exploratory study that explores the experiences of a sample of five participants. I talked to young men about their personal stories which relate personal introspection, interactions with institutions and relationships with people in their lives, set within a socially constructed reality that positions young men who become fathers in a certain way. It is not the intention of this research to make sweeping statements or to pretend that the findings of the study represent the findings of all who have an experience similar to the participants. What this enquiry does intend to achieve is to bring alive the humanity of five personal stories of real people and shed light on the processes that played a part in their construction.

It is clear that a tick box survey was never going to be the appropriate manner in which to go about attempting to grasp the reality of the experiences of young men who become fathers while still at school. The quantitative perspective on research can be used as just such an approach, being generally statistically focused and "likely to produce quantified and if possible, generalisible conclusions" (Bell, 1999, p. 7) and "broad-based explanations" (Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2003,

p. 727). This may be useful when looking at nationwide trends but that is neither the intention of this study nor the nature of this researcher. The imperative that drives this study is concerned with what we as humans make of the circumstance that the young man finds himself in, how we as a society build a certain reality that positions people to assume different roles, what influences the nature of those roles and how that influences outcomes for the young men. That is why the study has taken a qualitative approach that emphasizes the importance of human experiences. We want to know what it is like and how it feels. This research wants to get personal. A research methodology which "attempts to capture and understand individual definitions, descriptions and meanings of events" (Burns, 2000, p. 388) is the best fit for what I am aiming to achieve with this study.

2.3   SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH

Qualitative research is interested in the socially constructed manifestation of our world and explores the processes, qualities and meanings that are constructed by and between people. The central idea of social construction is that there is no single reality but instead the world is a series of constructions made by humans as a way of making meaning, and having some form of perceived control over their world and organization in their lives (Burr, 2003). People interacting in a series of relationships over a period of time start to form ideas about each other that develop in to roles and ways of doing things that become embedded in the social fabric as the normal, logical or natural way. In doing so, the alternative ways become marginalized by a dominant ideology that has become embedded so deep as to be invisible to the naked eye.

A clear example of the social collusion that goes into the construction of our reality is evident through daylight savings and the representation of time. When we agree to put our clocks back an hour and that three o'clock is now two o'clock, we as a society bare naked the social construction of time. We know what the "real" time is but we agree to use a new time. Notions to do with adolescence, fatherhood and gender are similarly constructed though we don't have a meeting about it and we hopefully are not putting the clocks back.

Before I presented the study I had to consider the ways in which factors such as the race, gender, sexuality, and social class of the researcher could inform the research. All research emerges from a set of beliefs about the world and how it we know and relate to it. Knowledge is a lens through which the world and its possibilities are defined. Notions to do with family, gender, fathers and adolescence, which are directly related to the experiences of young men who become fathers while still at school, are socially constructed and embedded in the fabric of society.

To accept the social constructionist notion that we have constructed a reality around us then leads us to what post-modernists call positioning. I have already introduced the idea of positioning in a previous chapter when I discussed positioning in relation to roles and discourse. Here the positioning is that of the research and the researcher. Social constructionists by definition acknowledge the subjectivity of experience inherent in the research process and believe that by explicitly revealing who you are and what position you are located in, the researcher can give "clarity to others as to what their perspective might be" (Eisenhart, 2002, p. 75).

Sources of bias in research have been identified as "the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent, and the substantive content of the questions" (Cohen & Manion, 2003, p. 281). With that in mind, instead of declaring false neutrality it is by coming clean on their position that a qualitative researcher looks to reach an understanding of the interactions between a person's positioning in society and their perspectives on their experiences. This is as true of the participants as it is of the researcher. It has been said that "the researcher who is sympathetic to the cause is no more or less objective than the researcher who is critical of them or the researcher who has a complex and ambivalent evaluation" (Ezzy, 2010, p. 169).

Working as a researcher I am aware that I am no less impartial than I am as a teacher, father, non-custodial parent or passer-by. If as Ezzy (2010) has said

"research is embodied, emotional and performed" (p. 169), then the emotional "positioning" of the research participants' relationship with the research and the researcher has to be acknowledged. Having some knowledge of the background of the researcher and the research allows for a form of deconstruction in that armed with the knowledge of the 'position' of the researcher the reader is able to locate the research and the researcher in relation to a wider context as well as to their own position. By "analysing his or her own background and agenda" (Eisenhart, 2002, p. 75) the researcher also achieves deconstruction through their own self-reflection.

2.4   RESEARCH PROCESS

2.4.1   Accessing and selecting the participants

Ethical approval was sought and gained from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. I then gained permission from the School Board to approach students (Appendix 1). However, identifying participants proved rather more problematic than anticipated. The participants of this study are members of a group that is largely invisible. There is no sign or recognition that a young man has become a father. The selection criteria were pretty simple. The participants were selected from their having recently had the experience that we were looking for and be willing and able to take part. Only three were identified directly through the school. One participant was selected who had a less recent experience than the others. He volunteered himself for the study and was accepted because it was felt that his contribution was still significant, as he provided a perspective that only time provides on the experience that the others had yet to gain.

 Where possible the participants were to be initially approached by a third party, on the basis of their known situation as teen fathers. Initially I thought I would access the participants in my study through school entities such as the school counsellor or teen parent unit. However, this approach did not work. These proved to be irrelevant as services to a young man who becomes a father while still at school. I found instead that the individual teachers who had been confided in and

the school's careers facility were the points of interface between the school and a young man who becomes a father. Staff at the school knew about my project and I knew of young men through my own positioning in the school.

The research opportunity was to be presented to the participants where possible through a staff member who knew them and their willingness to take part in the research confirmed in this way. There was potential for none to want to take part. As well, there were others who could be affected by such participation. The teenager at the centre of the study may or may not have a partner and child who may feel they have an interest in what he has to say and who he is talking to. Parents, parents of the mother, whānau or caregivers may feel that they have a right to be consulted.

In the end, identifying participants was more of a snowballing process. Obviously there is no study without the young men taking part. Two of the young men were made aware of my study by a teacher who knew their circumstances after they confided in him and they approached me. Another participant was a young man who I had previously taught who I ran into in the street. One young man was a high profile student who is a bit of a "Rock Star" at the school and another heard of my study by chance and volunteered himself because he thought his story would be useful to the study – a viewpoint that was accepted.

2.4.2 Interviews

The research method that is responsible for gathering the data central to this study was the interview. Some go so far as to call interviews "the most important data gathering technique a qualitative researcher possesses" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 385). The interview is the research method that is often used in qualitative research as a means of data gathering. Interview was the logical data collection method for this study since the object of the study is to document the stories of these young men in a way that relates the human experience and to "find out what is on their mind-what they think or how they feel about something" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 385). The interview gives the chance for "particular questions to be asked that cannot be asked in any other situation" (Walford, 2001, p. 92). This

is in the nature of what Cohen and Manion (1994) call "the transaction that takes place between seeking the information on one part and supplying information on the part of the other" (p. 271). We have all experienced interviews or seen them whether they were job interviews or post match interviews with sports players. A variety of types of interviews have been identified as "structured, semi-structured, informal/unstructured and retrospective" (Bell, 2005, p. 156). Interviews can range from a formal highly structured set of questions with the answers recorded on a tick box or checklist to a less formal interview where a series of questions can be asked and added to or elaborated on. In this study I have used a semi structured or what amounts to a completely informal interview style which Cohen and Manion (1994) describe as "where the interviewer may have a number of key issues which she raises in conversational style instead of having a set questionnaire"(p. 271). The basic scenario remains the same. In the course of "a conversation between the interviewer and respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent" (Moser & Kalto as cited in Bell, 2005, p. 157) the interview serves as a forum for "a creative search for mutual understanding" (Douglas, 1985, p. 25).

As I said earlier, this study wanted to get personal. As such, personal relationships are an important factor in the success of this study. It has been pointed out that "interviewers are human beings and not machines, and their manner may have an effect on the respondents" (Selitz as cited in Bell, 2005, p. 166). Some, such as Ezzy (2010), have argued that "it is the emotional structure of the relationship, as much as the well thought out questions, that underlie good interviewing practice" (p. 164). As such I wanted to register some sort of emotional barometer of the tone of general feelings around the interviews as well as the content and actuality of the transaction. In the context of my relationship with study participants the emotional structure has already been imprinted by our history and context of knowing from school. Some of these young men I had directly taught and had established a rapport with.

I have always found an interview a holistic experience that involves more than just oral communication and presentation skills. I was interested in noting down the types of clothing worn and the choice of venue, a long pause or perhaps the

light coming in the window in an attempt to capture some of the otherness in the context of the interview and perhaps glean some insight into how that may inform the data. While I was conscious of the setting and as I am aware the conditions in which interviews take place can "bias informants' replies and distract the interviewer's attention" (Powney & Watts, 1987, p. 130) I largely left it up to the participants to select the venue for the interview.

2.5   ETHICAL ISSUES

It is clear that ethics are part of the socially constructed reality that we as humans live in. Ethics function in a way that helps us position our actions and the actions of others in a moral framework that aligns with our overriding belief systems. All research raises ethical issues, why? Because it is "entering the lives of others, making public what many may feel ought to be kept private or secret and, indeed, [it is] about making changes whether to perceptions, bodies of knowledge, beliefs, values or to the circumstances of lives"(Schostak, 2002, p. 178). If ethics are located within socially constructed reality then they have different meanings to different people in different time and contexts. For example the issue of Human Rights and expressions of freedom of speech vary considerably depending on the context that they are located in. One of the most intrinsic roles that ethics play in research is in the protection or advocacy for the less powerful and more vulnerable. A foundation of sound ethics requires that issues that arise from the power relations that exist in the transactional nature of the research experience be addressed. In the research process the participant can be vulnerable to all sorts of experiences or consequences from being involved with the inquiry and in that they are making available for interpretation various forms of information that can be amassed by the researcher to draw any one of a variety of possible assumptions. The possible impacts, and how and whether these issues are able to be managed, form the nature of the ethical dilemmas faced by a research planner. One method that Cohen and Manion (1994) use to approach the ethical impasse is with their cost/benefits ratio that they apply to research criteria (p. 348). The costs/benefits ratio aims to balance the perceived costs to the participants against the hoped-for benefits that putting the participants through the research will gain. This approach reflects the often blurred nature of ethics suggesting that they are something fluid

or adjustable to meet a certain outcome. It is easy to see how when the stakes are high the perceived gains of large numbers may place pressure on the researcher and the rights entitlements of the individual. Cohen and Manion (1994) concede that the whole process of balancing beliefs against possible costs is "chiefly a subjective one and not at all easy" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 348). The main ethical issues in this study revolve around confidentiality and not doing harm. Some main ethical themes to emerge with regard to educational research are the issues of protecting participants from harm, informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality of research data. These are further outlined below.

2.5.1 Protect from harm

Some regard the obligation of the researcher to do all in their power to protect the participants from physical, and psychological harm or discomfort as "the most fundamental of the ethics" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 385). Any research into the experiences of people is a journey into a world of strong emotion, cross currents of unresolved anxieties, agendas and suspicion. Some have called interviews, the data gathering method used in this study, "invasive in people's lives" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006. p. 317) and comment on the power dynamics of an interview as being oppressive in nature. Of course interviews are invasive in people's lives, In this research this is especially so as we ask about personal circumstances that may well stir up strong emotions. Minimisation of the invasion of people's lives is central to this study's levelling of an oppressive power dynamic and lowering of the potential for harm. As a researcher it seems incongruous to me that any study should cause harm to anyone in the name of research. Therefore nothing but full disclosure of the possible outcomes of being involved in the research is acceptable in order to preserve the integrity of the individual's willingness to consent. The considerations need to be around the people that could be harmed by the study and whether the research could be done differently so as to minimise possible harm. The notion of protecting the participants from harm is manifested in the form of the idea of informed consent.

2.5.2 Informed consent

The principle of informed consent takes its root in a person's (in this case the participants') right to self-determination and free will. In a free society people being forced into anything, including research is a violation of individual freedom. As such consent must be sought and given from affected individuals, groups, organizations before any research can be undertaken because as Cohen and Manion (1994) explain "being free is a condition of living in a democracy, and when restrictions are placed on that freedom they must be justified and consented to" (p. 350). Through a statement like the one above it can be seen that the issue of informed consent lies within the construct of western democracy and is linked to the idea of autonomy and self-determination. Clearly if one was located within a context that does not value the freedoms and rights of the individual in that way then the notion of informed consent in relation to research would be of a different nature. Informed consent allows that the participant has full disclosure about the nature of the study and the researcher, about process and procedures, and what are the possible benefits and risks. Participants are allowed access to their own data and understand that they can withdraw their consent at any time up till the penultimate draft. Informed consent is to let the participant be aware of and think about what they may be getting themselves involved in. Informed consent also serves as protection for the researcher. "By clearly revealing the intent and nature of the proposed study to the interviewee and obtaining some form of informed consent and ensuring the respondents know about their rights and your responsibilities you are also protecting your own position"(Bell,2005, p. 157). In this study the process of 'protecting positions' and obtaining informed consent first involved talking and presenting the potential participants with an information sheet (Appendix 2). When discussing their possible involvement in the study I told the young men that it was *their* stories I was interested in hearing. It was *their* experiences of what it was like to be sitting in a classroom in school uniform and knowing that you have fathered a child, that I wanted to hear about. If they chose to sign the consent form and take part in the research I would ask them to think about exactly how it had been for them, whether people treated them differently, if they felt different, what was easy what was less so and basically just reflect on how the experience had been for them as that is what I was interested in. The information about the study was formatted in

an informal style containing information about myself as a researcher and an outline of the nature and intent of the study. The informal style was intended to demystify the study, present the research as worthwhile and the researcher as the non-threatening, genuine and approachable fellow that I am, and chip away at depowering the dynamics between not only research/researcher and participant but at a historical teacher and student relationship. Encouragement was given when talking with the potential participants for them to show the information sheet to others and discuss whether they were interested in being involved. If the participants decided to become involved with the study they filled out and signed a consent form (Appendix 3) that came attached to the information sheet.

2.5.3 Confidentiality

Great care needs to be taken with data throughout the research process and upon the release of outcomes so that identities remain unidentifiable. Keeping any data accrued through the research process as private is a basic component in ensuring the safety of the participants in the research. Often information that is gathered is extremely sensitive in nature and disclosure can lead to any number of consequences for the participants. The information made available to this study is personal and deserving respect for the gift it is. Nobody has to tell us anything so when people do privilege a researcher with access to parts of their private lives the researcher has an obligation to treat that opportunity with maximum respect. Poorly handled information can cause serious harm to the respondents, their families and the researcher himself. The removal of names and use of a variety of methods such as numbering or coding of respondents can serve to remove the actual identity from the information. In this study I have not named the school where the study obtained its participants from or the area of the country where it is located. As a tactic to retain confidentiality I have also changed the actual names of the participants. They were asked if they had particular names they wanted to use and some did while some were happy for me to give them a name for the study.

2.5.4 **Hierarchy**

I knew some of these young men as students from my school so there was already a power and emotional response inherent in our dynamic. I considered that I had a good relationship with these students and while I can use the emotional goodwill of a history with some of the participants as the basis for the grounding of interactions between myself and the young men, it served the purpose of the study for me to work as much as possible in my dealings with the study participants to distance myself from the power dynamic that is explicit in a teacher student relationship and replace it with a more empowering tone of mutual respect. Taking the school participants off campus so they could be free to smoke cigarettes was negotiated during the set up for the interview and recognized a new politic at work where the teacher/ student dynamic was renegotiated. While we may have signed a consent form this research uses the personal relationships between the participants and the researcher as the basis for access, consent and respect.

2.7   PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Each participant was asked to relate his experiences and before we started we discussed that the interview would be documented through notes and a digital audio recording then later transcribed into a narrative of the story that the young man was relating. I have organized the data into a series of narratives that feature paraphrasing and direct quotes taken from the participants' interviews. The narratives include age and other details of the participants and tell of their experiences, as far as possible in their own words, and the circumstances and people involved in their story. The narratives were presented back to the participants and their consent was not signed off (Appendix 3) until they had approved of the narratives as being a fair and accurate representation of their experiences.

2.8   REPORTING THE FINDINGS

The form in which the findings are presented, is a series of five narratives. A narrative is described as "qualitative social scientific research based on life histories, sometimes referred to as 'narrative analysis'" (Manning & Cullum-Sawn, 1994, as cited in Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2003 ,p. 643) or as "the narrative study of lives"(Josselson, 1996, as cited in Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2003 ,p. 643). Personal narrative has been described as "among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity" (Linde, 1993, as cited in Johnstone, 2008, p. 155). In this research the narrative also serves to bring to life the content and tone of the interview with the participants.

The next chapter is devoted to the presentation of the narratives. Following that, I will present an analysis of the discourses that I see informing the participants' stories, and lives.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH FINDINGS – THE VOICES OF YOUNG MEN WHO BECAME FATHERS WHILE STILL AT SCHOOL

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The following is a presentation of the narratives as related by the participants during the interviews. They run in a random order. The narratives begin with some background information on the participants and the interview. In some instances I had a previous school based history with some of the participants and that relationship is similarly outlined. The setting and context of the interview are observed as are the pre interview negotiations that took place. Regarded by the researcher as of interest the physical setting is commented on along with features such as clothing worn and time of day. The researcher feels that these components add up to flesh out a picture that he is attempting to create. The narrative is related to the reader in a manner that reflects the flow and tone of the interview and relationship between researcher and participant.

In the preceding chapters the research has introduced social construction and discussed the ways we as a society go about creating the shape of our reality through a process of collaboration that informs and is informed by a series of discourses. It has been understood that discourse can be seen a number of ways but for the purposes of this study discourse is seen as "ideas as well as ways of talking that influence and are influenced by the ideas" (Johnstone, 2008, p. 3). Notions to do with the various discourses around youth, fatherhood, gender and marriage have been introduced and when reading through the following narratives the reader is asked to ponder the features of the discourses and to what extent they have a presence in relation to the narratives. In reference to the participants as young fathers the term dirt bags has been used. The discourse of youth which positions young people as in transition, incapable, immature and vulnerable has been discussed, as has the role that the discourse on gender and heterosexual marriage has in the creation of the heavy weight of responsibility that informs the

discourse of fatherhood. It is discourses of gender, marriage and fatherhood that inform the obligation to meet responsibilities and a discourse of youth that assumes an inability to meet those obligations.

When reading through and reflecting on the narratives the observant reader is asked to be on the lookout for evidence of the measures that the participants have taken to construct their own reality in response to each of these discourses. The second half of the chapter contains an identification and analysis of the discourses and the constructions that emerge from the narratives that then sets the agenda for the following discussion chapter. The focus of the analysis will be on the identification of discursive constructions within the narratives, the positioning contained within them and their relationship to other discourses. These narratives are not only a window into the real lives of these young men and those around them but serve as a demonstration of the acceptance or not of the positions that are offered in a discourse. As we move towards the introduction of the young men's narratives to the study the researcher is aware that each person 'walks in their own moccasins', every life is unique and as such would like to acknowledge just what a privilege it is to be granted access to the stories of the lives of each of these young men.

3.2   GEORGE

I had a school history with this young man and felt I had a good relationship with him. I had seen this ex-student at his workplace and had noted he had been there for some time and had held down a steady job. It was not until I saw him in the car park with a toddler and young woman that I realised he may be of interest to my study. I asked him whether he was interested in talking about his experience and his reply was enthusiastic and genuine. A few texts later and we are relaxed in the front room of the home he shares with the family of the mother of his child. His young son played on the mattress on the floor warmed by the late winter sun.

He is 18 when we talk, he was 16 when he found out he was going to be a father. George lives with the mother of his child and her whānau in a house in the suburbs near the university. He has been working at a local branch of a retail

chain store for almost a year. George proudly told me he had got team member of the week two weeks before I caught up with him. He says he used to be into gangs "this was years ago, third form that was when I was hard out into that gang shit." George is a fairly tall guy and bulked up for a while, he seems less so now: "I used to play rugby for the school, league for the club, then got into drugs and stuff and couldn't be bothered." The gang lifestyle does not appeal anymore for George: "I look at my mates and what are you doing with your lives bro? They get all grouchy if they can't get their weed, that's why they do burglaries."

George likes kids and loves being a dad: "my whole attitude has changed ever since I was at school, I can feel it, just the way I talk, the way I act, *he* has just changed me aye. It's been mean, it's an experience, like it's brought me close to other kids as well, like when I first see a kid you know at work I used to be like hi, talk to the parent instead of the kid, but now I talk straight to the kid. It makes me feel comfortable."

I used to have George in one of my classes. I felt I had a good relationship with George though he could challenge some teachers with his behaviour. I would also see him around school and in other classes in my department. I had always thought he was a sharp guy but he was let's say "not engaged with his learning." I had seen George a couple of times working at a local retailer and we had caught up. I feel proud of George and what he has achieved.

George chose the setting for the interview as the home he shares with the whānau of the mother of his child. He says "nah it's all good, her mum's cool as." It was a red brick 70s style, white window pane type house. It was handy to where we were but it also told me that George was confident, felt safe and was keen to talk about his experiences. Casually dressed in track pants, sneakers, sweater and hoodie, George and I relaxed in the front room. His 9 month old son didn't, he played on the mattress that was on the floor and climbed all over the furniture and us as we talked. I could see from everything from his body language to the way that George spoke and how he interacted with his son that he was a present and engaged father for his son. There was a feel of positive change and calmness about the interview with George.

George had been going with his girlfriend for a short while when she became pregnant. She wanted to terminate the pregnancy but he did not. They agreed to have the baby "I was nearly sixteen (year 11) when I found out, I was happy but then I was like, I didn't know what I was feeling, just shocked, she wanted to get rid of it, but I didn't want to get rid of it and then I just wanted to get a job."

When I asked George about the reaction of others such as his and his girlfriend's parents he replies, "my girlfriend's step mum, when she found out, she didn't like me at all, judged me and hadn't met me yet, she snobbed me at my uncle's funeral. Oh yeah, I think it's because on my Bebo page, this was years ago, third form I made it and that was when I was hard out into that gang shit and it had all this shit on there, she saw it but I have never been on there since third form but I don't know how to get it off because I never really was on there, but if she looked she would see that I haven't been on there for years. I think she judges me on that."

"(At school) I told Ms T, she wasn't very happy either, like she was my mum. She was happy for me but she was shocked at the same time." George stayed at school: "I hung around until sixth form (yr12), half way through." "I just starting focusing on Career Education, I just started getting those credits or some kind of work experience or anything. Everything I learned, I remembered it all, you know health and safety, when I went to the interview (for the job he now has) they were talking about it and I already knew it all and they gave me the job, ha ha, I got team member of the week last week."

Once he had secured the job George left school: "when I left school, I actually wanted to go back. If I had gone back I would have done some work, got some more credits." He moved in with his "girlfriend" and her mother's whānau where he is now: "I only pay forty dollars a week." George is pretty happy with where he is at: "I was always good with kids."

George comments on his mates as supportive: "My mates were sweet as, some of them be cheeky though - 'your life is over brother', you gunna be on lockdown

and I'd say na bro my life's just beginning." "I look at my mates and what are you doing with your lives bro?" "I wouldn't mind working in the bush or on a farm."

It was then that George revealed that he had fathered another child and only recently became aware of the child's existence. "I found out I have another son but he is four, I found out a couple of months ago, it fucked me off, because why the fuck didn't you tell me, I would have been there, because it fucked up my relationship with my girlfriend. I didn't know how to tell her but I ended up just telling her." So someone you were close to reveals to you that you have a four year old son to her, then tells you that she told you that information because she is about to move to Australia ? " Yep." She visits and the boy "looks just like my son." "I met him for five minutes."

Epilogue: I saw George just the other day and he is still working at the chain retailer and living around the corner with the mother of his child and her family. "She has asked me when am I going to marry her, and I say when I am 40 (much laughter)."

3.3   MARIO

He was 17 when he got his best mate pregnant. She was a Maori girl and he was from a middle class Pākehā household. Mario was raised as a Mormon. He was kicked out of school after being told "You are not worthy enough to be going to this college." Mario is the second youngest of five children.

When I meet up with Mario he was 32 and had recently returned from a trip overseas. He is now married and has other children. Mario tells me that he was raised in the Mormon religion and that his was a middle class household. His parents got married because his mother became pregnant at 16 and he is the second youngest of six children. "Older brother was a teenager when he had a baby, same situation, got a girl pregnant, married her", the second had a child at twenty and Mario fathered a child at seventeen. Mario tells me that he is interested in my study because "It's a hard road to go down and not too many

people discuss it, not many give fathers the option of saying what your story is." I met Mario at university. He had always struck me as an interesting articulate and fun guy. When he heard of my study he asked whether I was interested in his story. I had some thoughts around whether to include the story of Mario. His is a largely historical experience as he was a father at 17 in the 1990s. I felt that his retrospective perspective might be useful to place alongside the contemporary experiences of the other young men I talked to.

Mario chose Starbucks and we ordered a coffee and held the interview. Mario wore a trendy stylish tee shirt and nice jeans and low cut white sneakers. As always I wore casual jeans, my hi-top black sneakers, tee shirt and hoodie(down). I rarely go to Starbucks but Mario seemed quite familiar with the place. He obviously felt safe enough here to talk freely. The coffee and comfy chairs certainly helped and the place was only half full. His was a reflective and sometimes bitter interview as he recounted his experience with the perspective that maturity and time allow.

Mario was 17; he enjoyed school and was a budding sportsman. "I was at school, I was playing a lot of rugby, I had some scholarships promised to me for playing rugby and then this happened and it was sort of like game over."

He had been with his best friend for a year when she got pregnant: "Twelve months we had been together, she was my first serious girlfriend." "I regard it as the worst moment of my life." "The tension between my mother and my family and her family created quite a strong division right from the outset, so the two families didn't get on. When the news was broken that she was pregnant then all hell broke loose, the two families didn't really gel, when really at that time you want the families to come together to support two young people, try and help them through this and give them some advice and that didn't happen."

"Her whānau were happy, my family were not." "Her family was open to it and it happened to a lot of her sisters as well, elder sister had a baby at 15."
"Your life is over" my mother said. She said "You've made your bed, now you've got to sleep in it." "I took that on." "Shucks I've got a kid now; I've got to work

my arse off for the rest of my life." "Dad was quiet, didn't say much, dad was a very moral dad and was always you know under the thumb but that was dad's life because exactly what was happening to me was what happened to him and mum, mum had a baby at seventeen. They don't talk about it, it's like a secret. I think that Dad didn't say too much about it because he felt hypocritical."

During our discussion termination of the pregnancy was never mentioned: "The church were encouraging us to adopt the baby out, for me that wasn't an option, I think that was because I wanted to prove people wrong, I can do this, I can get my career sorted."

When news of the pregnancy broke there was not only turmoil at home but also at school. Mario was kicked out: "I was let down by my church, my school and my parents." "One of the religious who runs the region he says because that's not in line with the church you are not worthy enough to be going to this college, which was like another slap in the face."

"The church says that you cannot live together if you are not married, so for the majority of her pregnancy I was not allowed to be with her, we got married a week after the birth. We got married, because as soon as you get married it's all okay in the church's eyes." "I was annoyed, here was religion dictating how I was living my life, so I am a bit anti religion."

In retrospect Mario feels that they should never have got married: "The girl's mother and I were very different people and we should never have been together, we were together 8 years, it was a struggle, it broke down because we were never supposed to be together." He says "we were together for the wrong reasons, for the kids."

No longer at school, Mario immediately set about getting a job: "I didn't have time to go out with my mates, I didn't have time to enjoy life, so I don't have old school friends or a history of teenage mates, unlike my partner (current)." "I had to go from a boy to a man overnight, I woke up the next morning and okay I've

got responsibility, and that was just who I am, I went out and got a job and started thinking about my career."

"I looked for a job cause I've got to support this baby and this lady that I am supposedly in love with. My parents never ever supported me, nothing and I never took a hand-out." "My first job I got was working as a cleaner at New World, 5 o'clock in the morning. I hated it; hated getting up early in the morning but that was always the thing I heard in my head: "You've made your bed, now you've got to sleep in it." "That's why I stayed with the mother for so long, not because it was the right thing to do, I was out there determined to prove everyone else wrong, because they were saying, it's not going to work, my family, a lot of people in the church, brothers and sisters never said directly but you knew that's what they think. That skews everything else, just because you want to prove every one wrong" because "the perception is that you are not going to make anything of yourself." "I can see why young guys could get angry, I could have gone screw the world."

Epilogue: Mario went to university to train as a teacher and has recently secured a position in middle management of a school. "I was let down by my church, my school and my parents, that's why I am a big advocate for young people."
He now has three children.

3.4   SONNY

Sonny is a high profile student at the school. He is a successful sportsman representing the school pride playing Rugby and Rugby League. Perhaps due to his status as a successful sports man I have had little directly to do with him over the years. Outside a classroom during study period before going to the school's careers facility Sonny sat in immaculate uniform outside on a school bench in the cool winter's day. "I am supposed to be going to the navy, but I want to be a sports star. I have been put in the system which is great." I asked about his family: "My dad passed away a few years ago, I've got one real sister, two half-sisters, two half-brothers, my mum has always been by my side."

Sonny is often seen delivering his daughter to the child care facility adjacent to the school he attends. He was more than happy to talk about his experience. "For me I am as happy as because I have a supportive family from both sides but for other kids, actually two both their girlfriends are down there and both left school to find a job. Oh yeah he is on the drugs."

It was inevitable that I see Sonny by virtue of his profile as an aspiring school sports star. Perhaps due to his status as a successful sports man, though we know each other I have had little directly to do with him over the years. Sonny chose a bench outside the canteen during a study period at school, it was handy. We sat in the cold winter sun and chatted about his experiences. His next class is at the careers oriented learning facility at the school. I felt his tidy uniform represented the focus and discipline he needed to succeed as a father and a sports star. He came across as positive and focused. "To be honest I wasn't a really bright kid in the third, fourth, fifth form I don't know what happened. After I met her things put me straight, something just happened up here, I just clicked on and suddenly two years later I'm the man, and now when I go to school I'm getting my education for my kid, it's not all about me."

Sonny and his girlfriend were both at high school. They found out they were going to have a baby just as she was about to go away on holiday. While she was away Sonny went around to her parents and broke the news. "It was pretty scary, her dad is a big fella." "They said they liked my manners and seemed a mature guy."

Sonny has married the mother of his child and has moved in with her family. "After thinking about it I made the decision to get married." "I chose to marry her, my goal is to be a sports star, you spend a lot of time away." "Basically I don't want my baby to have a step farther, I want to be with her be raised by both her parents so we are solid." "I had to make a couple of sacrifices and risks, like put some sports down, like marrying her, that was a risk, moving in with her and her parents, that was a risk, I have moved in and am part of the family." "Her parents are strict Mormons but now I am living there they accept that I am not."

He has supportive people all around him: "Everyone was pretty supportive. Mates, because I was really popular they saw me as a big brother having a kid so they are really good and they call themselves my baby's uncle, come around and see, they are really supportive. Even teachers they are always asking how the baby is, how I am doing, need any help it's been great, made it a bit easier." "I didn't really want to tell anyone. I was young, thought that everyone would put the big pressure on me, to find a job, support the baby n stuff."

Sonny is 18, still at High school: "It felt like I woke up, I wanted to make my family proud and my baby proud, I don't know what happened aye, now all the teachers say I am doing good at school."

Epilogue: The multi-talented sportsman Sonny, a proud father, has left school and is training hard as a prospect for a prominent sporting franchise: "I wanted to make my family proud and my baby proud",

3.5   LOU

The front line worker at the school student office asked me what I was doing a study on and when I told her she suggested that I talk to a student named Lou. She outlined what she understood his experience had been and how he had confided in her about it. She approached Lou and asked him whether he would be interested in talking with me. She informed me that he had told her that he would be very keen to talk about his experience. It was felt by myself and the receptionist (and his parents) that he may benefit from talking about his experiences with me.

This story was related to me in thirty two minutes and took place in the winter sun at a picnic table outside the shops at university. I bought him a punnet of chips and a coke while I had a latte. He wore his school jersey and jeans. He asked if he could smoke and I asked him to take his school jersey off while he did. He took the jersey off and promptly rolled and smoked a cigarette as we talked. I wore jeans, tee shirt, sneakers, sunglasses and don't smoke.

Lou is aged sixteen. He had met a girl who he was friends with at intermediate. They didn't see each other for 3 years (she went to a different high school) and then got in touch with each other again and "basically really hit it off. It wasn't until November when we went to a party and got a little bit drunk and we first did it."

"We had a good relationship up until the 16th of December when we did it and I realised the condom wasn't on and to find out when I got back to school that she was pregnant and I got told by somebody she knows that she was and she got it terminated without telling me and I really got upset about it."

"I completely fell off track, I was really not in the right headspace, as the day went on I got real shitty and I started lashing out couldn't deal with it and I actually broke down in tears at the health centre when I was talking to the nurse because really she is the only one I can actually talk to about this stuff because she understands."

"I didn't know she was pregnant at all, it broke my heart because as much as it scares me to be a dad at this age I actually was kind of looking forward to it and I was really disappointed, it was like being torn to pieces."

"It scared me at first but I was actually kind of looking forward to being a dad because as much as people say oh I would hate to be a dad I was actually looking forward to having a family."
"I really wanted to have kids."
"I thought to myself well if I am going to be a father then I may as well grow up, stop being a dickhead and take responsibility for my actions."
"I would have left school and gotten a job to support it."
"I was actually angry more than anything." "Well, I think about it, kind of pisses me off when I am with her and I am just like thinking, why did you do it, you could have at least told me that you did get it terminated even though I would have been pretty upset but you could have told me."
"I didn't have a say in the situation, that's what really hurt me, like I had no right, no say even though it was my child."

"I had asked mum to send me to Australia, just to get away, I have cousins in Australia."

"My family was shocked at first but they understood. Mum was absolutely beside herself because she couldn't help me." "There was a shock of horror on her face." "Mum and Dad's initial thought was oh you are an idiot but they learnt to get over it and they started to help me."

"My parents, the nurse, my friends, and my younger sister, she has been really supportive, that really shocked and amazed me that my little sister was so supportive"

"A few of my friends know, like my friend James, he went through the same situation but not really the same situation, he found out he has got a two year old son, me and him completely understand each other and I've told a couple of friends and they call me an idiot but most of all it's my friends that understand the most." "Those guys have been really supportive."

"I had a few run ins with teachers but school's all right now, I want to come back to school to play rugby, I want to become a diesel engineer."

"Me and her, we broke contact for six or seven months when out of the blue she contacted me and asked how I had been."

"I said oh I have been okay. Really I haven't but I started to mellow out. As time went on I started to get over it. So what I think, what's in the past is in the past, no point making a big deal out of it."

"We are real good friends now"

What have you learned? "When you do it wrap it."

Epilogue: I saw Lou just the other day and he has managed to still be attending school. He told me that he was 'good' and was studying to be an engineer. Lou has re-established his relationship with his friend and sex is "the last thing" on his mind.

3.6   JAMES

Venue; anywhere outside school where he can have a cigarette.

I was referred to James or James was referred to me by Lou. I was told by Lou that James had found out that he has a two year old son a few months ago. James told me that he had had sex with his older sister's friend when he was 14 and she was 20. James is a Pākehā fella.

James tells me his Dad has been in jail for all "except for about 22 months of my whole life, gang related. He is one of the hang arounds, he's in with all the skin heads but he is part Māori."
Lou had told me that James had found out that he has a two year old son a few months ago. Both of these young men are still at school and have "behavioural issues."

I caught up with James and we decided to meet the following day and he would tell his story. He asked me if we could go off the school grounds so that he could have a smoke. I signed him out and we went to a local café. Initially I challenged James as to whether he was straight up or was just in it for the chips and to get out of Math? He reassured me he was "straight up." A teacher colleague later informed me that James had confided the story in him a few months ago. That gave me three people to verify the existence of James's experience. James was wearing a non-uniform hoodie (down) that a teacher had given him because it was cold. Over a hot chocolate and curly fries with aioli he told his story.

James is 16. He took a drag on his cigarette and told me that he had had sex with his older sister's friend: "I was 14, decided to root one of my older sister's friends. I was 14 she was 20." He seemed pretty chuffed: "not many guys get to do that aye," he boasted. Perhaps he is right.

James never saw his sister's friend or thought anything more of the event until "she turned up with my sister one day and said you, you little cunt you got me pregnant."
"At first I was in disbelief, I hadn't seen her until she turned up with my sister and this kid, but after a couple of weeks of seeing him it just kicked in. We started talking, figured out its mine, from the dates." The boy was nearly 2 years old.

James accepts that the child is his: "some of the things he does, I saw the resemblance, I think it is mine."

"Mum was a bit like, what's going on? But then she goes 'he is exactly like you when you were younger' and says he looks just like I did at that age. I have played with him a couple of times."

Mum said, "If you are old enough to stick it in and get it wet you are old enough to take responsibility."

While James is stoked to have a child he now is not so sure where he stands: "She is married now and I think her husband thinks it's his."

"Now she's going through that it's yours, it's not yours stage, oh make up your mind."

"I would not get a DNA test; I don't want to get stung for child support payments."

Epilogue: James never came back to school after the summer break. I have asked Lou if he had seen him around but he told me that last time he saw James he was talking about doing some pre trade training as he wanted to become an auto mechanic.

3.7   THE GUY THAT GOT AWAY

I had been given the name of this guy. He and his girlfriend were often seen around school holding hands. She had become pregnant and was attending the school Teen Parent Unit while he saw the year out then left. I rang this guy at least six times. Called around a couple of times and never managed to catch up with him. When I rang I was told he was asleep or gone out. Maybe he was one of the young men that Sonny referred to as "on the drugs." When I mentioned his name to the Teen Parent Unit Head she said that he had been banned and they thought he had been physically abusing the mother of his child. He was "not welcome." Sonny had a few things to say about this guy having a "gang related background" and that he comes from a "gang family". He was a talented sportsman too, good at rugby and league, just ended up "smoking too much drugs". I was disappointed not to catch up with this young man as it is exactly guys such as this that I was

looking for. Later under the heading of future study it is an inquiry into apparently disaffected young fathers such as this young man that I recommend.

Epilogue: I have been told by Sonny that this young man has since separated from the mother of his child and sits around smoking pot all day. Word was that he had become abusive and that after a cycle of violent break ups and reconciliations he no longer sees his child.

3.8 REFLECTION

It should be obvious from these narratives that the young men of this study feel deeply about what they have been and are going through. Why wouldn't they when what we are talking about could scarcely be more personal. What is clear is that the experience has brought about huge change to the world of these young men and the narratives relate the ways that they have been affected by and have adapted to the new situational context of their lives. A goal of the study was to identify discourse at work in the narratives of the young men's lives. The second part to this chapter presents an analysis of the narratives and identifies discourse at work in the lives of these young men. It has been suggested in previous chapters that teenage fathers are affected by a wash of layers of different discourses and suffer from a number of stereotypes. So should the brave young men in these narratives really be described as 'dirt bags'?

3.9 IDENTIFYING DISCOURSES IN THE NARRATIVES

The dissemination of values and cultural practices and the reinforcement of social order have a huge impact on a man who becomes a father whether he is mature or still at school. Traversing as he does across such academic battlegrounds as gender, sexuality, family and human development, the young man who becomes a father experiences the restrictive social conditions of hegemony most acutely. Previous chapters have introduced the discourses that shape the realities of the participants' experiences and come to dominate their lives. In this part of the study I take the research data as presented in the narratives and identify discourses and constructions within them. According to Willig (1999) "in order to identify a

discourse we need to establish what is being talked into existence, how this construction positions subjects and how it refers to other discourses" (p.114).Therefore the focus of the analysis will be on the identification of discursive constructions, the positioning contained within them and their relationship to other discourses.

3.10 DISCOURSE OF FATHERHOOD

Consistent with that they were asked to talk about; the participants framed their experiences within a fatherhood discourse. But probably because of their situations, the features of the discourse as it played out in their stories stood out and begged for critique. The discourse of fatherhood is constructed by these fathers as having an exclusive personal relationship of some manner, even if conceptual, to a child and mother. Being a father therefore signifies a connection on a personal level with at least two others. From within the discourse constructed here having no knowledge of or relationship with those significant two is incompatible with being a father.

Participants' answer to a question about becoming a father provides a clear illustration of the fatherhood discourse and what it means to these men: "I was there, it was hard for me to see the baby come out, I didn't actually watch it, I couldn't, I seen the head then after that I just slipped away but they videoed it and I watched the video, I will remember that for the rest of my life" (Sonny); "the church were encouraging us to adopt the baby out , for me that wasn't an option" (Mario); and Lou "Yeah I had a real good picture about it, me being real happy knowing I was going to be a dad, but to have that privilege taken away from me really gutted me". The participants' constructions of fatherhood were relational, with two others included references to fatherhood as "it's not all about me" (Sonny). It is here that a connection to the role of father and a notion of responsibility is implied.

3.11 DISCOURSE OF YOUTH

When young men such as Mario say "I had to go from a boy to a man overnight" and Lou "I thought to myself well if I am going to be a father then I may as well grow up" and George "I stopped being a dick and just starting focusing" they are speaking of the repositioning of themselves and their youth as fathers and adults in an adult world. Some participants' constructions of this perceived disruption of youth as a transitional stage included references to the idea of "growing up" (Lou). The positioning of the reality of being a father within the discourse of youth and vice versa is the source of tension between discourses. Constructed in this way and framed within a discourse of fatherhood, once you have fathered a child you are obliged to that child and that means you have responsibilities to meet. This implies that if you can meet your responsibilities then you are no longer a youth. The discourse around the positioning of youth finds a tension lies around a perceived (in)ability to meet the constructed obligations at the centre of the discourse of fatherhood. Mario, George and Lou expressed those attitudes implicitly. As a result, in order to maintain the association between fathering a child, fatherhood and taking responsibility, fathers of whatever age as constructed in this way need to "step up". The sense of "stepping up" and taking action to meet the position of obligation that they felt they had was reflected by all the young men who participated in the study. To even question such a notion of obligation is akin to heresy. The discourse around teenage fathers calls into question the ability of the teenaged father to take that responsibility and contribute on a meaningful basis. As one of the participants (James) himself said "I don't want to get stung for child support payments before I even have a job".

3.12 CONSTRUCTIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The discourse of fatherhood is constructed here by these fathers as having to be responsible. When the participants answer a question about finding out they were going to be a father their responses provide a clear illustration of the application of the notion of responsibility that comes with the fatherhood discourse; "I just wanted to get a job" (George), "I would have stepped up" (Lou), "I looked for a job 'cause I've got to support this baby and this lady that I am supposedly in love

with" (Mario). Constructed in this way being a father carries an obligation to 'step up' and take responsibility that helps define the role. Constructions of responsibility included responsibility of providing for the care and nurturing of the child and the construction of responsibility for the very existence of the child and consequently the situation. The mantle of responsibility equally serves to define the role of those that are not thought of as good fathers by not providing for the care of their children as irresponsible or 'deadbeat dads'. These constructions were enacted by participants in order to account for their relationship to mother and child and the feeling of a responsibility to "step up" (Lou). I didn't have time to go out with my mates, I didn't have time to enjoy life. My first job I got was working as a cleaner at 5 o'clock in the morning. I hated it, hated getting up early in the morning but that was always the thing I heard in my head 'you've made your bed now you've got to sleep in it', my life is going to be like this (Mario).

Use of language and phrases such as "got a girl pregnant" (James) serve to position young men as responsible and active in creating the situation and the woman as passive and an 'innocent victim'. I do know some people that like to use the phrase 'fell pregnant'. Not sure what they fell in to. James was fourteen and the woman who became pregnant was twenty and is now twenty two and with "you got me pregnant" uses language that offers him the role of being at fault, positions him as responsible for the pregnancy and positions herself as innocent victim. The discourse from which these attitudes occur is the discourse of human sexuality that sees sex as a "male preserve that renders women as innocent victims" (Willig, 1999, p. 117) and not sexually agentic. There is a discourse of marriage that informs the discourse of sexuality in that it favours only having sex for procreation reasons within the sanctity of marriage. Those who fall outside those descriptors or fail to use contraception were being reckless and should face the consequences. Mario was given that message in no uncertain terms when told by his mother "you made your bed now lie in it". "The perception is that you are not going to make anything of yourself" (Mario). Positioned as outside the moral parameters of the institution that dominated his life Mario set out to "prove everyone else wrong" and that he was a responsible, worthy person. In the meta narrative the positioning of responsibility on a different level is taking place and that is the positioning of the pregnancy and obligations of care as a private matter

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between two people and not as part of an open public domain of interest. In terms of responsibility this positioning places all burden of responsibility within the sphere of the family and the home.

3.13 SUMMARY

The narratives speak of a variety of situations that the young men found themselves in and the ways they responded to the reality of teenage fatherhood. The contrasting fortunes of these young men and their circumstances though differing offer common responses to the positioning of themselves as fathers. Emerging constructions of fatherhood as responsibility were seen from all participants as expressed by the term 'stepping up' and is discussed further in the next chapter. Alternative constructions were observed as the notion of household and family was renegotiated in the narratives of George, Mario and Sonny. The discourse of youth which questions the credibility of a young father on his abilities, inclinations and motivations has been cited in the dialogue serving as motivation for some participants to 'prove them wrong' (Mario).

The following chapter discusses the discourses reflected in these narratives of the young men's lives and asks how the experiences of the participants relate to these dominating discourses.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Well you have read the narratives and the analysis. The reader has been granted a quick look into the lives of five young men who are out there doing their best. The previous chapter presented and sought to unpack the data from the narratives and draw to light the discourses that are present within them. It has been demonstrated that there are a series of multiple discourses that dominate our participants' experiences. These are the discourse of youth, the discourse of fathers, the discourse of marriage and the gender discourse. In this chapter I will draw on the previous chapter by way of its narratives and discourse analysis and seek to extrapolate the points it raises in order to examine some of the wider issues around the experiences of the participants.

Analysis of the narratives has demonstrated the various ways in which discursive constructions of responsibility and the discourses in which they are grounded position their users. The participants positioned themselves as within a discourse of fatherhood, and as such, they were "responsible men", which meant that they were obligated. The men are positioned as obligated by virtue of their part in the conception of the baby.

4.2 GENDER POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

Within discourses of human sexuality, the gender discourse positions the male as the sexual initiator and the woman as naïve and sexually passive. The promotion of condoms as personal protection in sexuality education positions the male as responsible for conception, immaterial of his age. As long as sex remains constructed as male lust and female ambivalence, the male will always be positioned as responsible. In this construction it is the man who is responsible for the initiating of the sexual act and then by extension the consequences of said act. A correspondingly powerful construction applies to the woman who is also held accountable for "letting herself get pregnant". There is more to the construction of

responsibility represented in this way than the simple providing for the upkeep of offspring. The discourse of heterosexual marriage is responsible for the gender positioning of the father as provider and the mother as nurturer. As a result, in order to maintain the association between fatherhood and taking responsibility, fathers of whatever age, constructed in this way, need to "step up".

4.3   CONTRADICTORY POSITIONING

Often times during this research I have wondered just what the heinous crime was that these young men had committed since all they had appeared to have done was have consensual sex with a willing partner that resulted in a pregnancy. The strongly felt opinions and vehemence of labels such as dirt bags and statements such as " you've made your bed" are the more overt expressions of discourse but there are other ways to get the message: "my family, a lot of people in the church, my brothers and sisters never said it directly but you knew what they think"(Mario). The way these young fathers talk at times it is as if they are criminals. Whatever it is that these young men have done to deserve such treatment nobody seems to have died at their hands, quite the opposite in fact. The sex was consensual; these young men are not rapists. The dirt bag nature of the accepted discourse positions young fathers as if they were. There is a sense that somewhere a violation has occurred that renders the young men as at fault. Perhaps the fault is not physical but rather a violation, where teenage pregnancy is a rupture of the conventional discourse of heterosexual marriage and youth. The common response to that rupture is the positioning of the male as dirt bag, responsible and thereby obligated.

The source of the sense of obligation in the discourse of fatherhood and the construction of responsibility lies embedded within a marital discourse of sexuality that positions sex as only for procreation and that those that fail to use contraception were being reckless and should face the consequences or as James was told by his mother "if you are old enough to get it wet you are old enough to take responsibility". Implicit within this notion of obligation lays a perception of a father not as a person himself but as what he represents and what he can bring to the table, that is, he is treated as a resource. The discourse around youth calls into

questions the ability of the teenaged father to take that responsibility, be that resource and contribute on a meaningful basis. To not be providing or contributing to the care of a child is seen by many as incompatible with the notion of being a father. This gives rise to the term "Deadbeat dads". We have the dichotomy of the Deadbeat dad and the good provider. Who is going to provide for the young mother and baby if the father cannot? As one of the participants (James) himself said, "I don't want to get stung for child support payments before I even have a job".

4.4   RECIPROCITY?

While the discourse positions fathers as obligated and positions the child and mother as dependents, readers will have noted that on three occasions at least no such reciprocal obligation appeared in the narratives. The situation where Lou described himself as "being torn apart" took place without his knowing anything about it. This is a reflection of a discourse that sees the father as having an obligation of care for a baby yet for Lou there was no reciprocal obligation (or respect) felt to him as the father: "she got it terminated without telling me and I really got upset about it". He could have been a father: "it scares me to be a dad at this age. I actually was kind of looking forward to it". But when it came to decisions around termination or even knowing of the pregnancy, he was kept in the dark. As were the two young men who were told of the existence of a child up to two years after the child had been born: "I hadn't seen her until she turned up with a kid" (James). James says he believes the mother of the child has told her new husband that the child is his so does not see him. While one participant who was made aware of an abortion after the fact said "like I had no right, no say even though it was my child" (Lou), there was a sense of frustration and powerlessness when George says "I met him for five minutes, and then she said she was moving to Australia". What George is supposed to do and how is he supposed to feel is an answer he has to grapple with, in a situation like that. The way that this experience informs subsequent relationships is indicated by Lou when he says "it's kind of changed my opinion of them (girls) like how you thought you could trust them". When speaking of the abortion of the child he had fathered, Lou said, "I didn't have a say in the situation, that's what really hurt me". What these voices

are telling us is that these men are available to accept the role positioning of the construction of responsibility in the fatherhood discourse and they want to be involved but others have decided for them what they should and should not know. With reference to earlier writing of the discourse of youth, for a young person this is a familiar situation to be in.

In the narrative of Lou we have a young man who did not know of the pregnancy until he found out about the abortion. The young woman who was pregnant knew and Lou said she had told him that her mother went with her and yet they felt no level of responsibility or obligation that manifested into action enough to tell the young man who had fathered the child: "you could have at least told me that you did get it terminated even though I would have been pretty upset but you could have told me" (Lou). The action taken was to not tell him. If you recall the narrative, Lou found out about the termination from a third party through gossip in science class. Again what Lou is supposed to do and how is he supposed to feel is an answer he has to grapple with in a situation like that: "I completely fell off track; I actually broke down in tears at the (school) health centre". Something does not seem right. These young men are being treated appallingly. None of these guys are bad people or have done bad things to people. What the narratives reveal is participants who are doing what they think are the right things to do in response to the scenario they find themselves in. These narratives presented fathers who care getting put through the wringer.

4.5   ABSENT FATHERS?

There is a discourse of fatherhood that I have only really touched on and that is that you are supposed to care. As a father, not only are you to be situated in an intimate personal relationship with a mother and child but the implication is that you care about them, are engaged in their existence and treat them with respect dignity and love. On reflection on the narratives the participants made themselves available as fathers within the prescribed discourse while some of these same participants were also denied their fatherhood through termination or control of access. What these experiences raise for us are issues of voice and visibility. Participants were unhappy with the lack of voice in any decision making; "I found

out a couple of months ago, it fucked me off, because why didn't you tell me, I would have been there" (George), "I didn't know she was pregnant at all" (Lou). It has been said that the participants of this study are "members of a group that is largely invisible or absent" (Coleman, 1998, p. 311). Gauging from the narratives it is not only that the participants make themselves so; it is that they are rendered invisible by others and become absent that way. The absence of James and George was not an absence they controlled neither was the absence of Lou. When you have no voice you have no power and are absent from decision making and therefore invisible in decision making. Invisibility is an aspect of the experience that all these particular fathers share.

4.6   SUPPORT: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

When I started this research I felt confident I wouldn't meet a bunch of dirt bags. Why would I? I expected them to be school students like any other. At school the students who had become fathers were also invisible. One of the ways that they were invisible was in the experience of Mario, where he became invisible because he no longer attended the school. Geographically and socially school was the place where all the young men had met the girls who would become the mothers of their children. It is disappointing to note that roles at the school put specifically in place for the pastoral care of the students were not the natural "port of call" for these young men. Instead, they went to specific teachers or support staff with whom they had special relationships – or at least, who they obviously saw as avenues of trust and confidence. Lou mentioned the school nurse as being there for him otherwise the school counselling services were never once mentioned by the young men as a place for them, neither was the school Teen Parent Unit. Sonny was the only participant who had visited there, and the other potential participant that I knew of had been told he was unwelcome there, due to his behaviour when visiting. The significance of the fact that the school careers facility was mentioned by nearly all the participants indicates the role it serves as a conduit for students, out of school and into paid employment. This links with the construction of responsibility and obligation of the discourse of fatherhood.

4.7 SUPPORT: THE ROLE OF THE FAMILIES

Contrasting family reactions which position the pregnancy in different ways go a long way to informing the tone and nature of the reality of the experience of the participants. Particular heroes for the participants are those supportive families of their own and most especially of the young mothers. By configuring their positioning of the pregnancy, negotiating a new construction of family in a positive inclusive way and incorporating the new reality they are acknowledging and end up in fact accommodating the young father:” I have moved in and am part of the family. Her parents are strict Mormons but now I am living there they accept that I am not” (Sonny). This is the construction of a new discourse of family and fatherhood within the family. Both Sonny and George commented on the solid support and positive positioning of their experiences: “I have a supportive family from both sides” (Sonny); “Her mum’s cool, she only charges me forty dollars rent” (George). With a repositioning of the family there is more accommodation going on here than a simple roof over the head. Charging forty dollars rent to a guy on minimal wage is tacit approval that serves as a mechanism that allows George to cohabit with the mother of his child under the roof of her family household. The family experiences of George and Sonny in relation to that of Mario are of particular interest in that the punitive tone of the parental response to his situation. When his mother told him “your life is over” the effect of the assignment of blame is palpable alongside the “made your bed now sleep in it” comment recounted by Mario.
 The desolate isolation of a statement such as that blows straight from the Antarctic. “I regard it as the worst moment of my life, I was let down by my church, my school and my parents” (Mario).

4.8 YOUNG FATHERS

The research has revealed these young men are invisible as individuals, as a group, in decision making and in research. As I began this study I identified that there was a paucity of research on young men who become fathers while at school. Quite early on I pointed out the negative discourse around young fathers with the “dirt bag” comments and the tone of much of the reading, both in media

and in government reports. Young fathers have been under researched and are therefore misunderstood. Part of the issue that contributes to this research situation involves the inherent characteristics of the subjects of research and the researchers that undertake study in this field. Young men will only talk to some people and they most certainly will only talk to some people about the issues that we have broached in this study. Unlike the mothers, identifying and gaining access to the participants is somewhat more difficult for many social science researchers due in part to their invisibility.

The participants didn't tag anything when I was with them, they didn't offer to sell me drugs and I didn't have anything stolen. They were just young men trying to make sense of their experience and create an existence where they can just get on with their lives. A major goal of this study has been to shed some light on the situation of these young men and to examine the background and nature of the processes that go into the social creation of the position they find themselves in. The study has revealed that the participants are keen to be involved as fathers and that the participants take this experience very personally and feel their journey intensely.

As an alternative to the punitive nature of the discourses impacting on them there need to be better ways to construct the context for these young men in a more positive and empowering way. The way that the supportive families reconfigured themselves demonstrates that there are other ways of constructing a reality and that there are alternatives. The families showed that with a positioning of pregnancy that accommodated the reality of the situation in a supportive way. Like the schools, families and government institutions we have got to do better for the young men who find themselves in this position and this study has been an attempt to do just such a thing.

"I am not through it but I am getting there" (Lou).

4.9   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like any research, time and money are limitations of this study. The sample/participant size reflects the exploratory and intimate nature of this research. Carried out over the course of a calendar year, time allows for a measured perspective and provides an opportunity for retrospection. The study profited by time spent earlier and established relationships with some of the participants involved at school. However identifying participants was not as straightforward as I had anticipated. I count myself lucky to have found five willing participants, and to have them tell me their stories as candidly as they did. I would like to think this is a strength of the study, even though the number of participants might seem like a weakness. More time to carry out more in depth interviews with participants and gather a wider group may further enrich the scope of the narratives. I am conscious of the limitation that locating my source of participants from one area has and the particular demographic profile that area may produce. The narratives presented are the result of informal interviews with five young men about the experience of fathering a child while still at school. The point of view of their dialogue reflects that they were being asked about *their* experiences and *their* thoughts and feelings. The narratives are limited to the participants that could be contacted and were willing to take part.

4.10   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

By the time you get to this part of the reading perhaps you are outraged that young men in our society should be treated in this way and see scope for further study. Further study can be undertaken from this enquiry at a number of levels. I believe that the relationship between gendered positioning, notions of responsibility, and punitive discourses would support generous research in future. Development of this study would be further inquiry into young fathers but also a study that focused on those who have young fatherhood denied them due to whatever circumstance. I am interested in the consequences for a young man who is somehow denied fatherhood as was the experience of Lou, George and James in the narratives. I wonder what sort of damage is inflicted on a developing psyche if emotional fallout is not appropriately respected and resolved. Whilst it is difficult to identify

and get connection with the invisible young fathers, it would be potentially more possible to find fathers who are older, like Mario, and to find out about the effects on their lives. The popularity of TV programmes like Missing Pieces would suggest that there could be an appetite for looking back at broken connections. There is also a great need for inquiry into situations of 'ghosts' such as the guy who got away in the narratives. If young men like him are feeling like the ones who stayed and talked about their experiences, it is possible that understanding their point of view might help them as they do indeed grow into men. In many ways the young men who appeared in this study, while invisible, at least I got as far as talking with them. They were still functioning with a relative normality. It is the search for hidden voices such as the voice of the guy that got away that should reflect the direction of new research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter to School Board of Trustees

To the Board of Trustees.

As you may know, this year I have been granted study leave at Waikato University to complete a Masters in Education. The topic of my study is **The experiences of young men who father a child while still at school.**

This project has now received approval from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee. I write to the Board of Trustees to seek potential participants in my research amongst your school student population.

I would like to approach up to four potential participants through school entities such as the Teen Parent Unit or School Counselor. If the Board agree, I will ask whether they are happy to help, and explain the study. Upon making contact with the participants, the young men will be informed of the nature of the study, their rights and measures to be taken to preserve confidentiality. They will be asked to sign an informed consent form. All participant identities as well as the identity of the school will be concealed. The participants will be offered the penultimate draft of the study to look at, and if they are happy with how their stories have been treated, the draft will be made available to the board for your consideration should you require this.

Please find enclosed a brief outline of the study and a consent form. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at (*cellphone number*), or I am happy to attend a Board meeting should this be required. My University supervisor is Dr Wendy Drewery, and she can be contacted at (*phone number*) should you have further questions or concerns about what is proposed, or the way the study is being conducted.

Thank you

Kerry Cooper

Appendix 2: Information sheet for participants

What are the experiences of young men who father a child while still at school?

Hi there, my name is Kerry Cooper, you may or may not know me but I have been working as a Teacher at (*High school*) for seven years. This year I am on study leave at Waikato University and am doing some research for my Masters in Education in to *the experiences of young men who father a child while still at school.*

If that is you I would like to ask if you wouldn't mind taking part? I am interested to hear about *how it's been for you* since you found out you were going to father a child.

I am interested in the impacts fathering a child has had on

- the way you see life
- relationships with friends, parents, family, teachers, church etc
- the attitudes of others to yourself, the way people treat you
- your attitude to school and education
- the use of your time

So I would ask you to please think about those things before we meet.

It would be one interview of an hour or so where you are free to talk about your experience and I might respectfully ask questions along the way. We need to be aware that there is a chance that talking about your experience may be upsetting or weird for you. You do not have to talk about anything that you don't want to and can stop and withdraw at any time, no problem. It is your story that I am interested in. I would tape the interview and I would like to use quotes in my research. To protect your privacy I would change names and places so that you would not be identified. I would show that to you for your approval. You could choose a name to use if you like. Hey, all information will remain private and confidential.

If you have any questions or are not happy with anything to do with the research then you can and should please contact me or my supervisor Wendy Drewery.

So What's in it for you?

- You will see a version of your story written down. By taking part you are adding to a body of knowledge and are helping others to understand what it is like to go through what you have been through.

- By hearing your experience places like schools might be able to change the way they do things to make them easier for guys like yourself.

- Thinking and talking about how it has been for you may be a cool learning experience.

- FOOD. I will buy you a burger and chips somewhere and we could conduct the interview there if you like.

I would like to make the point to you that it is *your* experiences and what *you* may have been thinking or feeling? I am interested in.

Thanks for reading through this. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Kerry Cooper

Appendix 3: Informed Consent

I _____ consent to becoming a participant in the research being conducted by Kerry Cooper titled: What the experiences of young men who father a child while still at school.

I understand that the research will involve:

➤ one taped interview that will be kept secure and confidential

➤ a follow-up meeting to allow reading and responding to the first draft analysis of the findings.

I consent to the interview data being used for the research. I understand that the research will use pseudonyms and will avoid disclosing names or identities. Pseudonyms will be assigned in conjunction with the participants, and other changes may be made where descriptions would make it easy to identify a participant.

I consent to the data being part of this study and to be used for subsequent conference papers and articles.

Supervisor Contact Details: Dr Wendy Drewery

e-mail: phone ext:

Signed_____ Date: _____

Full name: _____ phone: _____

Email: _____

Preferred method(s) of contact: phone / letter / email (circle as many as are preferred)

Preferred place of contact: home / school (delete one)

The pseudonym I wish to be known by is

_____.

If I do not suggest one here, I permit Kerry Cooper to choose a one to be used instead of my real name.

Appendix 4: Return of Penultimate Draft Analysis of the Findings

(a) letter to accompany return of Penultimate Draft Analysis

Street address

Suburb

City

Mobile:

Email:

Dear _____,

Enclosed is the penultimate draft of my research. No one else has seen this draft other than my supervisor. The text is on my computer and has a password for access purposes, so it is secure.

I would appreciate you reading the penultimate draft and adding, deleting or altering parts of the document that concern you. Please make comments and return it by mail with the accompanying form releasing the draft for use in my thesis.

If you have no alterations to make, please keep the draft copy and simply return the enclosed form.

If you would like to discuss the draft before returning it, please feel free to contact me.

I look forward to receiving your responses and the accompanying form. If I have not received this release after three weeks, I will telephone you.

Regards,

Kerry Cooper