Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

University of Alberta

Engaging, Understanding, and Supporting Teen Fathers

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Human Ecology

Fall 2013
Edmonton, Alberta

For

Stefan, Pem and Paul,

the three fathers in my life

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the sparse body of knowledge on teen fatherhood and to bridge the gap between research on teen fatherhood and the implementation of formal support for young fathers. Three papers identify and discuss three different aspects of teen fatherhood that are important to consider when addressing the disparity between existing research and inadequate formal support.

The first paper, "Engaging Young Fathers in Research through Photo-Interviewing" contributes to research in the field by presenting photo-interviewing as alternative to conventional face-to-face interviews with young fathers. The paper reports on possible advantages of using photo-interviewing with a group of young fathers: Photo-interviewing may be less threatening to participants, adds a new (visual) dimension to the data, and can be empowering to participants. However, further research and the development of innovative approaches are needed to more successfully engage young fathers in research.

The second paper, "Teen Fatherhood against the Odds: Finding Meaning and Purpose through Fatherhood," reports young fathers' perspectives on their experiences of being a father. The findings of this paper suggest that the transition to fatherhood is a window of opportunity for fathers to turn their lives around, despite past and present adversities. Moreover, the purpose and meaning of fathering a child was found to be central to the young fathers' identities in this study. This paper contributes to the small, emerging body of knowledge that conceptualizes fatherhood as potentially beneficial to young fathers.

The third paper, “Features of Successful Programming for Young Fathers,” identifies three factors essential for agencies to successfully support young fathers, a vulnerable group that is often overlooked by support agencies. Valuing and welcoming fathers, adopting a male perspective, and providing a safe haven and a secure base were the pivotal elements to connecting with and providing meaningful support to young fathers. These identified factors may assist agencies to implement and improve services for young fathers. This dissertation identifies problematic areas in research and practice on teen fatherhood and offers some direction in how to engage with, learn more about, and successfully support young fathers.

Acknowledgement

This dissertation could not have been written without the hospitality and support of the University of Alberta and the Department of Human Ecology. There were also a few important people who introduced and re-introduced the idea of doing a PhD to me. I thank Peter Mucha, Willie van Peer, and Don Kuiken for their support and kindness. I also would like to thank all the fathers who participated in my study and so willingly shared their experiences with me; it touched me deeply.

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Berna Skrypnek, who patiently listened to everything I had to say, was accepting whenever possible, and challenged me whenever needed. I am particularly grateful for her generosity, kindness, and for providing so many learning opportunities for me. I would like to offer my special thanks to Kaysi Kushner for being a warm, steady, and supportive mentor throughout this project, for her careful and thoughtful reviews of numerous drafts, and her constant positive encouragement. Also, I would like to express my great appreciation to Maria Mayan for sharing her expertise and humor and for introducing me to qualitative research. The EQUIPP program was the best thing that happened to me during my time in University. I would also like to thank my external committee members, Annie Devault and Pushpanjali Dashora, for agreeing to be on my committee and for their thoughtful and helpful comments.

I am also very grateful to my family and friends outside of Canada for supporting me and praying for me from a distance. Thank you. Special thanks to

Hannah Goa, for being there from day one and for helping me through the Comprehensive Exams by bringing by beer and lasagna and writing me hilarious cards. Thank you to the Mengel family for their continuous support. I am very grateful for all the help and support with childcare, dogsitting, housebuilding, and for a new, shared turkey dinner family tradition.

Finally, the biggest thank you goes out to my beautiful family, Paul, Malou, and Ella, who kept me going and helped me to keep everything in perspective. I thank them for being my biggest fan and my biggest support! My deepest thanks goes to Paul for picking up the slack and for always saying the right things at the right moment. Sharing my darkest and my happiest moments with him made this dissertation possible.

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INTEGRATING CHAPTER: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Research on fatherhood and the importance of father involvement[1] for children has steadily grown since fatherhood became a "hot topic" two decades ago (Marsiglio, 1993). Although to a lesser extent, this trend is reflected in research on teen fatherhood as well. Compared to the existing body of research on teen mothers, however, research on teen fatherhood is still underrepresented. Moreover, there remains a noteworthy and surprising mismatch between research evidence indicating that teen fathers are a vulnerable group that needs targeted support to remain involved in their children's lives and the lack of formal social support and targeted programming for young fathers in North America (Deslauriers, Devault, Groulx, & Sévigny, 2012; Trivedi, Brooks, Bunn & Graham, 2009). One explanation for this mismatch is that "young fathers are either invisible or absent" (Coleman & Denison, 1998, p. 311) and remain the "forgotten partner" in the academic and public discourse about teen parents (Medical Institute for Sexual Health, 2011; Stengel, 2005).

The purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the body of knowledge on teen fatherhood and to bridge the gap between research on teen fatherhood and the development and implementation of support programs for young fathers.

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[1] The term father involvement encompasses a father's direct and indirect involvement in a child's life, irrespective of residency or custody status (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000). I chose the term father involvement because it is the predominately used term in this body of literature. It refers to the relationship between a father and his child that involves at least one of the three dimensions of the parsimonious model developed by Lamb, Pleck, Chernov, & Levin (1987): Engagement (caretaking, play, teaching), availability (general accessibility), and responsibility (decisions that organize child's life). It stands in contrast to fathering a child (as a biological father only) and to fatherhood (connoting cultural or societal norms or ideologies of being a father).

This integrating chapter introduces the impetus for this research, briefly summarizes relevant background research, and describes some of the journey that led to this dissertation research. The introductory chapter is followed by three papers in publication format that contribute to the discussion in three areas of teen fatherhood research which are underexplored to date: First, the research process itself, particularly the suitability and practicability of using in-depth interviewing as a research strategy with teen fathers; second, the experiences and the underlying meaning of fatherhood from young fathers' own perspectives; and third, possible strategies for agencies and organizations to better support young fathers who face a variety of barriers that impede their involvement with their children. Finally, a concluding chapter summarizes how these three papers contribute to the emerging body of teen fatherhood and identifies implication for policies and practice and directions for future research.

Impetus for Research

Although the research on teen fatherhood has grown over the past decade, teen fathers, compared to teen mothers, are still invisible and the "forgotten partner" when it comes to policy or program support (Medical Institute for Sexual Health, 2011). For instance, the main service agency in Edmonton, Alberta, supporting young fathers, *Terra Centre for pregnant and parenting teens,* faces difficulties in supporting young fathers compared to young mothers, due to a lack of funding, so that some fathers cannot access support when they need it (R. Wells, Coordinator at *Terra Centre*, personal communication, November 5, 2012). The persistent invisibility of young fathers

and the lack of services for them may be due to the fact that to date "much more is known about the circumstances and consequences of teen parenthood for women than it is for men" (Scott, Steward-Streng, Manlove, & Moore, 2012). The following three papers attempt to contribute to our understanding of teen fatherhood and to bridge the gap between research, and its implementation into practice, by enhancing the understanding of teen fatherhood from three different perspectives.

The first paper focuses on the research process by describing the experiences of using two different research strategies with young fathers: conventional in-depth interviews (i.e., interviews that rely on words only) and photo-interviewing (using photographs as props during an interview). Although in-depth interviews are the most popular research strategy in qualitative research (Nunkoosing, 2006), it seems to be less effective with young fathers, since adolescent men are known to be less willing to share personal experiences and thoughts with an unknown researcher (Dumesnil and Dorval, 1989; Hutchinson, Marsiglio, & Cohan, 2002). The reluctance of young fathers to engage in research leads to the omission of important perspectives and inadvertently results in young fathers' being understudied and unwittingly excluded from support programming and services.

The second paper explores the purpose and meaning of fatherhood from the perspective of young fathers. This perspective is underexplored in the dominant discourse on teen fatherhood, which continues to emphasize the risks, negative consequences, and bleak prospects of teen fatherhood. This paper

attempts to look beyond barriers and negative consequences related to teen fatherhood by exploring young fathers' perspectives of their experiences of being a father. Findings from this paper suggest that young fathers are a vulnerable group who experience their young fatherhood as fundamental to their identity development and find themselves at a critical stage in which timely support programs and targeted services to fathers are necessary to increase the likelihood that fathers remain involved in their children's lives.

The third paper identifies three essential factors necessary for agencies to provide successful support to young fathers. This paper addresses a gap stated in the Inventory of Policies and Policy Areas Influencing Father Involvement of the Father Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA): "Due to limitations in research and the relative lack of programming directed at young fathers, new developments must generally be of a pilot nature with ongoing assessment and evaluation to determine their effectiveness" (Ashbourne, 2006, p. 78). The third paper contributes in a tangible way to this research gap by identifying key strategies for establishing and improving programming and support for young fathers. It provides agencies with suggestions of key agency and programming characteristics critical in reaching out to and connecting with young fathers and offers some specific recommendations for how to deliver services to young fathers to provide them with service and support they need.

Background

It is well documented that father involvement is beneficial for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid

& Bremberg, 2008). There is also some evidence that father involvement benefits fathers' own personal development (Palkovitz, 2002; Settersten & Cancel-Tirado, 2010). Unfortunately, an increasing number of children grow up without their fathers (Department of Justice Canada, 2004). For children of teen parents this risk is particularly high (Marsiglio, 1987). Although research suggests that teen fathers want to be involved in child rearing (Rhein et al., 1997; Shannon & Abrams, 2007), only a small percentage end up staying in touch with their children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Rhein et al., 1997). Approximately half of all teenage fathers initially live with their children in the same household at the time of the child's birth (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Fagot, Pears, Capaldi, Crosby, & Leve, 1998; Marsiglio, 1987). However, this percentage decreases significantly to approximately 25% after several months (Larson, Hussey, Gilmore, & Gilchrist, 1996) and to even less after a few years (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Larson et al., 1996). According to Parke (1996), young fathers do not consciously decide whether they want to be involved or not. Rather, their involvement is determined by the interplay of evolving internal and external factors related to their fatherhood. Besides facing the same obstacles as "adult" fathers, such as lack of role models for involved fathering (Daly, 1993) and maternal gatekeeping (McBride et al., 2005), teen fathers face a myriad of additional individual, familial, and social barriers that impede their involvement in their children's lives. Additionally, despite their increased need of support, young fathers experience a lack of formal support and services.

To take into account some of the contexts influencing teen fatherhood and teen father involvement, this dissertation employs human ecology as a broad organizing framework. The focus of human ecology is on "the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Three core human ecological principles guided the research of this dissertation: the importance of context for human development, reciprocal relationships, and human betterment.

First, a human ecological lens enables a look beyond the deficit perspective of a teen father as "dead beat dad", by examining and acknowledging the contexts in which teen fatherhood takes place (e.g., family background, formal social support services). Second, although human beings are shaped to a certain degree by their contexts, they are not determined by them. Rather, human beings are active and flexible in their reciprocal relationships with their contexts that change them and that they, in turn, change as well (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993; Visvader, 1986). Lastly, human betterment is another important human ecological principle. Based on this concept of human betterment, human ecologists employ a strength-based perspective and attempt to enhance people's capacities in wise decision making and improving their quality of life (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993; Westney, Brabble, & Edwards, 1988).

In the following, a variety of contextual factors are reviewed to gain a more comprehensive view of barriers that impede teen father involvement such as teen fathers' personal (e.g. maturity level and personal resources), familial

(e.g., role models, emotional and informal support), and social (e.g., formal resources, social policies) factors.

Individual Factors Affecting Father Involvement

Developmental immaturity. Adolescents undergo a set of cognitive, social, and emotional changes during their transition to adulthood that includes forming a sense of identity, entering intimate relationships, and emancipating themselves from their family of origin (Aries, 2001; Erikson, 1980; Marcia, 1980). Since becoming a teen parent forces adolescents to prematurely enter adulthood and parenthood, teen parents' expectations of parenthood are often immature, unrealistic, and egocentric (Aries, 2001). Consequently, they are not well prepared to cope with the extensive demands that parenthood entails. Further, teen fathers have more difficulties maintaining romantic relationships with their child's mother than "adult" fathers (Coley, & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Thornberry et al., 1997). While these interpersonal difficulties are seen as normative in adolescence, they likely contribute to teen fathers' disengagement from their children.

Lack of resources (education, material and financial means). Teen fathers' lack of financial resources and material support is known to impede involvement with their children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Mollborn, 2007). One social problem is that teenagers from impoverished backgrounds are more likely to become teen parents to begin with, compared to teenagers who do not grow up in poverty (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Adolescents with histories of poor parenting (Serbin et al., 1998), who were raised in low-income families

(Bunting & McAuley, 2004), and who grew up without fathers themselves (Furstenberg & Weiss, 2000; Thornberry et al., 1997) are more likely than their socially advantaged peers to become parents before age 19. Therefore, teen fathers often face familial, social, and economic disadvantages even *before* the baby is born and are usually unable to fulfill the role of financial provider (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).

However, financial providing is socially tied to the father role and many men stress the importance of fulfilling this role for their families (Christianssen & Palkovitz, 2001). Fathers who supply financial support are more likely to be involved, especially when they are not married and do not live with their children (Johnson, 2001; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Moreover, there is some evidence that young fathers who are either employed or have high school education are more likely to stay involved (Carlson, 2004). Teen fathers find themselves "between a rock and a hard place" when they face the decision to either stay in school and have a chance at a better paid job in the future (but not be able to financially support the child and their partner during schooling), or to drop out of school and struggle with low paid jobs or unemployment (and still not be able to financially support the child and their partner). The problem they encounter is twofold: They need *more* money to provide for a child (food, diapers, housing), but, compared to adult fathers, teen fathers have *less* access to available resources. Without support (from within or outside the family, such as free housing or help with childcare) it is highly unlikely for teen parents to

sustain their new family and simultaneously have time and energy to finish school (Mollborn, 2007).

The pressure to financially provide leads some young fathers onto the path of delinquency. Especially in impoverished neighborhoods, selling drugs is sometimes perceived as the only option for young fathers to financially contribute (Feigelman, Stanton & Ricardo, 1993). Paradoxically, drug involvement enhances fathers' likeliness to be involved in child rearing unless the father ends up in jail (Rhein et al., 1997; Shannon & Abrams, 2007).

Lack of parenting skills. Lack of parenting skills is an identified barrier for teen fathers to engage in child rearing. Although research is scant on teen fathers' parenting skills, scholars widely assume that teen fathers, like teen mothers, struggle to provide parenting that fosters desired developmental outcomes in children (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Taylor, & Dickson, 2001). Teen mothers are at high risk for psychological dysfunction that affects their parenting and the quality of relationship with their infants (Trad, 1995). Because of their tendency to misinterpret their infants' cues, teen mothers were found to be less stimulating, less responsive, and more aggressive with their children (see Fagot et al., 1998 for review). Teen fathers' background characteristics are strikingly similar to teen moms' in terms of psychological immaturity, disadvantaged socio-economic background, and increased involvement in drugs and other criminal behavior. Thus, it is unlikely that teen fathers are better equipped with parenting skills than teen mothers. An aggravating factor is that persistent cultural, social and political ideologies still foster the role of men as providers

rather than nurturers (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Townsend, 2002). Teen fathers' insecurity around parenting responsibilities likely decreases their participation in childcare, which in turn leads mothers to assume that fathers are not interested in being involved (Rhein et al., 1997).

Familial Factors Affecting Father Involvement

Lack of role models. There is some evidence that patterns of father involvement are transmitted across generations (Furstenberg & Weiss, 2000). Research on "adult" fathers suggests that fathers who lacked paternal role models or had strained relationships with their own fathers are often concerned about how to function as appropriate role models to their own children (Daly, 1993). Teen fathers grow up significantly more often without any father figure and they specifically lack the stable presence of a biological father or stepfather in their own childhood (Devault et al., 2008; Furstenberg & Weiss, 2000; Thornberry et al., 1997). According to reports of teen fathers, they not only lack a positive father figure, but also often witness negative behavior such as paternal drug use, violence, or gang involvement (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). These negative role models contribute to young men's insecurity and lack of knowledge about what it means to be a "good" and involved father.

Couple relationship. The quality of the couple relationship between teen parents has been found to be a key factor in affecting the amount of paternal involvement — the closer and more committed the relationship, the more likely it is for teen fathers to be involved in their children's lives (Carlson, 2004; Gavin, et al., 2002). Since teen parents are seldom married (Bunting & McAuley,

2004) and are more likely to terminate their relationships (Thornberry et al., 1997), teen fathers are particularly at risk of disengaging from their children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Coresident and employed teen fathers who are in a romantic relationship with the mother of their child are the most likely to be involved, followed by nonresident teen fathers in a romantic relationship. A father's commitment to his partner and his child as well as the mother's emotional support were strong predictors of father involvement at one year after birth (Carlson, 2004). Teen parents who terminated their romantic relationship showed the least paternal involvement (Carlson, 2004; Johnson, 2001). The instability of teen relationships is clearly a risk factor regarding the lack of father involvement.

Maternal gatekeeping. Maternal gatekeeping is a phenomenon that both "adult" and teen fathers experience. Mothers often function as gatekeepers who control and manage the time fathers spend with their children (Parke, 1996). According to McBride et al. (2005), father involvement is "moderated by mothers' belief about the role of the father" (p. 368). Furthermore, fathers are more likely to have positive perceptions of themselves as fathers when mothers indicate that fathers ought to be involved (McBride et al., 2005).

Particularly in the case of unmarried teen parents, other family members such as the child's grandparents are influential in the amount of access fathers have to their child (Furstenberg, 1995; Gavin et al., 2002), especially when the teen mother lives with her own parents who participate in childrearing (Danzinger & Radin, 1990). In particular, maternal grandparents are known to

restrict fathers' access to their children (Fagot et al., 1998; Rhein et al., 1997). Thus, a teen father may face maternal gatekeeping on two levels: He needs to negotiate the terms with his child's mother and gain the approval of his child's maternal grandparents to remain involved (Gee & Rhodes, 2003).

Family support. There is some evidence that social and emotional support from family members enhances the chance that fathers remain involved in their children's lives. Moreover, if teen parents receive familial support early on (optimally before the baby is born), the likelihood that teen fathers remain engaged and committed increases (Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). However, the literature also suggests that many fathers instead encounter hostility from their own and their (ex-) partner's family, especially the maternal grandparents (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). The decision to be an involved father entails a change of lifestyle and resolving the tension between the need to financially provide and going to school. Whereas research suggests that social support is one of the strongest determinants for fathers to remain involved in their children's lives, familial support may also undermine and restrict fathers' involvement with their children, especially when teen parents' own parents disapprove of the couple relationship.

Social Factors Affecting Father Involvement

Societal male roles. Despite the now greater diversity in family structure and fluidity of gender roles, gender remains a "fundamental organizing principle of social life" (Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2000, p. 272). The societal expectation of fathers to provide is as prevalent as that of mothers to nurture (Christianssen

& Palkovitz, 2001; Townsend, 2002). Although fathers are currently conceptualized as nurturing and coparenting (Pleck, 2004), being a provider is still seen as the primary responsibility of fathers (Townsend, 2002). Since teen fathers typically struggle to provide financially for their children (Devault, Deslauriers, Groulx, & Sévigny, 2010), they do not meet predominant societal expectations and are more likely to disengage from their children.

Discrimination and marginalization. Teen fathers are discriminated against legally and socially. Those who want to be involved but are not acknowledged on the child's birth certificate, or have no determined custody or visiting arrangements, lack legal rights to be involved in their children's lives (Ashbourne, 2006). But even legally, acknowledged fathers face discrimination from institutions and communities (Ashbourne, 2006) and are excluded from receiving social services offered to teen mothers (Miller, 1997). For instance, teen mothers in Edmonton have the opportunity of attending a school exclusively for pregnant and parenting teens which provides on-site day care; teen fathers cannot attend this school and there is no comparable school for teen fathers in Edmonton. Likewise, *Terra Centre*, an agency committed to supporting teen parents, encounters financial difficulties to provide programming and services to young fathers equaling those available to young mothers (R. Wells, Coordinator at *Terra Centre*, personal communication, November 5, 2012).

Another area where teen fathers face discrimination is in the academic discourse. Earlier studies have often portrayed teen fathers as unstable, criminal, and irresponsible "deadbeat dads" (Glikman, 2004). Current research is finally

beginning to shift from a deficit perspective to a strength perspective that focuses on the potential and the resiliency of teen fathers (Carlson, 2004; Kimball, 2004). Because of the wealth of research on risk factors (e.g., incarceration, delinquency, and drug use) associated with teen fatherhood, one might assume that teen fatherhood is a *cause* for deviant behavior. While some research suggests that teen fatherhood contributes to delinquent behaviour, such as dealing drugs as a source of income (Rhein et al., 1997; Shannon & Abrams, 2007), other researchers oppose this opinion. Thornberry and his colleagues (2004), for instance, who investigated the relationship between leading a deviant lifestyle and becoming a teen father concluded: "While earlier involvement in deviant behavior and a deviant lifestyle is related to the odds of becoming a teen father, teen fatherhood is not significantly related to later involvement in criminal conduct (…) teen fathers are not more likely than those who delayed parenthood to be involved in general offending or in violent crime" (p. 12). Teen fathers who remain involved with their children often articulate the constant battle they face with stereotypes and social institutions (Allen & Doherty, 2004).

To summarize, multiple overlapping individual, familial, and social barriers impede teen fathers' involvement in their children's lives. Further, social policies, common practices, and the academic discourse implicitly and explicitly contribute to the exclusion of teen fathers from social support.

Lack of Formal Support Affecting Father Involvement

Given the myriad of individual, familial, and social barriers, it seems evident that young fathers need formal support to overcome those barriers and may particularly benefit from intervention programs and policies that promote and support their involvement in their children's lives. Surprisingly, despite the awareness of young fathers' difficulties, there remains a lack of action to successfully implement formal services and support programs for young fathers (Deslauriers et al., 2012; Rozie-Battle, 2003). One reason for this support gap could be the gendered traditions of the social support system.

The social support system in North America was initiated to decrease women's social and financial disadvantages, and despite societal changes it remains focused on women's needs, not on men's (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). This can lead to implicit discrimination; for instance, when the term "parenting" is employed as a synonym for "mothering". Ashbourne (2006), for instance, posited that "gender neutral language is often used and understood by both service-delivery personnel and families accessing programs as meaning 'mothers only'" (p. 61). Although young fathers require (and should receive) equal social support, current practice puts young fathers at a disadvantage compared to young mothers. "Some programs claim to work with "young parents", but when looking at their goals, objectives, and services, they are clearly focused on the young mother and/or the child" (Rozie-Battle, 2003, p. 82). For instance, while financial and educational help is readily available for young mothers, there is limited support for young fathers (R. Wells, Coordinator at *Terra Centre*,

personal communication, November 5, 2012). However, research evidence shows that educational and financial supports are particularly effective in aiding young fathers in their provider role and increases their chances of remaining involved in their children's lives (Kost, 1997, Sander & Rosen, 1987). Nevertheless, *Terra* faces constant difficulties convincing funding agencies to financially support programs (such as parenting education) for teen fathers, as one of the directors describes:

> I know for sure in Alberta, that there's a lot of what I would call red-neck attitude about men need to be tough and men don't need to reach out for help and men don't need to be nurturing fathers. Like, I think that is still a prevalent attitude in society. And yet of course we're battling that. Always. And I think that's why it's hard to get recognized beyond the scope of the helping position, it's hard to get funders to buy into that - because they don't understand themselves what they're buying into. (K. Caine, interview, February 27, 2008)

Another issue related to supporting young fathers is the lack of knowledge around fatherhood from fathers' perspectives, which leads to discrepancies between young fathers' needs and services provided (Deslauriers et al., 2012; Weinman, Smith & Buzi, 2002). For instance, a recent systematic review of 18 studies (3 quantitative and 15 qualitative) investigating pregnancy prevention and parenting support found that negative stereotypes of young fathers and falsely portrayed models of masculinity lead to existing support

programs being ineffective and even problematic for young fathers (Trivedi, Brooks, Bunn & Graham, 2009). Young fathers who do not have access to social support are forced towards the margins of society, which is linked with disempowerment and deprivation from material resources and social goods (Luttrell, 2003).

In summary, in line with the increased academic interest in teen fatherhood, more needs to be learned about teen fathers' needs and experiences from their own perspective (Ashbourne, 2006). The appropriateness of simply making services and programs designed for mothers available to fathers has been questioned. Thus, researchers have called for the development of programming that is responsive to the unique needs, interests, and learning styles of young fathers (Skrypnek, 2002; Trivedi et al., 2009).

The Journey

The journey that the qualitative researcher embarks on has the reputation of being "messy". In contrast to quantitative research, "qualitative researchers aim not to limit a phenomenon—make it neat, tidy, and comfortable—but to break it open ... so that a description of the phenomenon, in all of its contradictions, messiness, and depth, is (re)presented" (Mayan, 2009, p. 11). However, since the quality of a published paper or a study report is usually assessed by how concise, clear, and rigorous study findings are presented, the struggles and uncertainties during the research process are rarely discussed in published papers or reports. This next section gives some insights into some of the contradictions, messiness, and problems that I encountered and that shaped

this research. In hindsight, some of the issues that I faced turned out to be valuable experiences contributing to the end product. Although it is less comfortable for researchers to explore different angles and perspectives of the phenomenon of study and to tolerate the ambiguity and change of plans that come with it, it seems a necessary part of the process, as Thomas (2004) explains:

> It is not unusual to begin in a fog. A certain amount of wandering around is inevitable before it is possible to find one's bearings and gain a sense of direction. It is necessary to tolerate uncertainty at the beginning of a project, starting out with a broad view, scanning for a range of possibilities and then narrowing down to a specific focus. (p. 70)

Research Process

Interestingly, my own experiences of "fog" and "wandering around" appeared much later in the research process when I was in the midst of my data collection. Initially, the research had a promising start, with my involvement as a practicum student at *Terra Centre for pregnant and parenting teens*. *Terra* is unusual in Edmonton, since it is the only agency that offers a Young Dads Program since 2002. Further, from my collaboration with *Terra* and conversations with other agencies (e.g., at city-wide meetings with other agencies I attended with *Terra*), I learned that it was considerably more difficult for an agency to reach out and connect with young fathers in comparison to young mothers, that funding for programming and services was limited and

insecure for young fathers, and that male teens were more likely to disconnect from the agency than females. These first-hand perspectives from experienced service providers dovetailed with the process of reviewing existing research literature on teen fatherhood, which resulted in identifying two research gaps that were directly connected to the experiences articulated by service providers: 1) Of those teen fathers who initially want to remain involved in their children's lives, the majority of them disengage during their infants' first year of life (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Larson et al., 1996); and 2) Formal support for teen fathers was sparse (Rozie-Battle, 2003) and the question how to support them effectively, unexplored (Kost, 1997).

Intrigued by these two key findings, I planned two studies. The purpose of study one was to better understand the dynamics and circumstances of teen fathers' involvement in and disengagement from their children's lives. Why do teen fathers disengage from their children over time? And what are the key factors contributing to the involvement of those teen fathers who remain involved in their children's lives?

Study two came out of the realization that the agency *Terra* was distinctive in successfully providing services to teen dads. I was interested in learning more about what this agency was doing that enabled them to be successful in engaging and supporting highly vulnerable young fathers and in contributing to their ongoing involvement in their children's lives despite a lack of funding and the reported difficulty of reaching out to males by other agencies.

The following describes my journey as I began to investigate these questions and how I came to conduct the research presented in this dissertation.

Since my initial goal (study one) was to learn more about teen fathers' disengagement from their children's lives, and the factors that helped them to remain involved, I had anticipated interviewing teen fathers in different situations (i.e., fathers who were in a stable relationship with their partner living with their children, fathers who separated from their partner but were still involved in their children's lives, fathers who were initially involved but then disengaged from their children, etc.). However, of the ten first fathers who I interviewed all of them were currently involved. One father was disengaged from his first child, but was involved with the newborn of his new relationship.

Here started the "fog" and some of the "wandering" around that Thomas (2004) mentioned, as I had anticipated to interview both involved and disengaged fathers to examine both the process of involvement with and disengagement from their child(ren). Moreover, the data I gathered seemed to be more about their own experiences of growing up than about father involvement per se. Another difficulty was that I had to rely on outreach workers from two support agencies (*Terra Centre* and *Bent Arrow*) to recruit participants. Since the Ethics Board directed me not to approach participants myself, my recruitment strategies were limited to distributing flyers and getting in contact with participants through outreach workers of the two support agencies. Nobody responded to the flyers; thus, I solely recruited participants through outreach workers. This turned out to be a significant barrier for recruitment, due to staff

turn-over, a lack of trust between outreach workers and new clients, and the heavy caseload of outreach workers.

Another concern that emerged was my increasing doubt about the suitability and practicality of conventional interviews as research strategies with young fathers. Although I felt that I was building reasonably good rapport with my participants, the interviews somehow felt "off". After the first ten interviews I did not seem to reach the level of depth I was hoping for. In retrospect, I was naïve. Since young men are known to be hesitant to openly discuss their personal perspectives in an interview (Dumesnil & Dorval, 1989; Hutchinson et al., 2002), it was unrealistic to expect them to open up to me (somebody they had met only once or twice). Also, the interview situation, as it was set up, seemed to need improvement. I observed that the mere fact that I asked them questions possibly put them in a defensive position.

These unexpected concerns and challenges during my data collection process led to several changes in the research process. First, to address the shortcomings of my conventional interviews, I added photo-interviewing as a visual component to the study. I thought that my participants would have more fun taking pictures associated with being a father and talking about their pictures rather than participating in an interview that relies on words only. The experiences of using both conventional interviews and photo-interviewing as data collection strategies are described in my first paper. Second, because of the challenge to recruit fathers who were disengaged from their children, the focus of study one changed. Instead of looking at disengagement/involvement I

focused on the young fathers' perspectives of their experiences of being a father. Consequently, it was guided by the research question: "What are young fathers' perspectives on their experiences of teen fatherhood?" Finding meaning and purpose through fatherhood in the context of the adversities and barriers young fathers experienced is the focus of the second paper.

The third paper is a product of the second study planned, investigating why *Terra Centre* was successful in engaging and supporting highly vulnerable young fathers despite a lack of funding and the reported difficulty of reaching out to males reported by other agencies (personal communication with service providers at city-wide meeting, October 4, 2007). It is guided by the research question: "What are the key factors related to successful provision of formal services to teen fathers from the perspectives of a non-profit agency and their clients?"

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

As described above, my initial intention was to explore teen fathers' involvement in and disengagement from their children. For this endeavor, grounded theory, with its focus on process, seemed to be the most suitable method. However, mainly because of the challenges of participant recruitment, the focus and goal of my research changed during my research journey. Since the newly developed research questions were more specific and had as their primary goal to contribute to the development and refinement of formal programming and services for teen fathers, interpretive description (Thorne, 2008) became the more appropriate method for both studies. Although interpretive description was

developed for the nursing discipline (Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997), it became a popular method for other applied fields due to "its potential to address practice problems across applied disciplines" (Oliver, 2012, p. 409). Thus, interpretive description, with its contextual nature and its pragmatic orientation towards practice, was applicable to and a good fit within the realm of human ecology.

Consistent with interpretive description, I approached and interpreted the data using the technique of constant comparative analysis, which has its origins in grounded theory and describes a technique that compares parts of the data (e.g., interviews, segments, emerging themes, etc.) with the whole data set to conceptualize themes and theorize about their relationships (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Thorne, 2008). For both studies, I first read and coded each transcript noting labels or descriptors after each paragraph or section at a more general level. During this stage, I asked myself: "What is going on here?", to familiarize myself with the data and then coded segments and paragraphs with generic terms or labels (Thorne, 2008). In a second step, I used the specific research question to identify and create preliminary themes.

For instance, the themes of study 2 (reported in paper 3) were framed and identified by the research question: "What are the key factors related to successful provision of services to teen fathers from the perspectives of a non-profit agency and their clients"? At this first level of analysis, I divided the findings into two groups: 1) characteristics of the agency, describing *Terra's* successful factors on the organizational level (e.g., the organization's mission

and values and male and skilled social workers) and 2) characteristics of the *Young Dads' Program,* entailing specific factors related to formal services provided to young fathers, (e.g., a flexible approach and a focus on doing). Since the two groups I identified merely described the relationships of the themes in the data at a superficial level, I went back to the raw data and started to "re-think" the data on a more abstract level using constant comparison. For instance, I realized that my artificial division between the characteristics of the agency and the program was not useful, since some of the subthemes (e.g., belief in fathers or being father-friendly) were important for both groups (agency and program). In other words, I realized that the content (i.e., the underlying concepts) was more important and meaningful than the format (i.e., characteristics of the agency or program). Letting go of the distinction between agency and program allowed me to "move beyond the self-evident and superficial in linking the groupings and patterns" (Thorne, 2008, p. 149).

My second step was similar to what Glaser (1978) described as theoretical coding. Thorne et al. (1997) emphasize the necessity to "engage in both the ethereal abstractions of theorizing and the earthbound concrete realities of the practice context in order to produce sound and usable knowledge" (p. 175). Constantly comparing individual parts (comments, interview sections) with the whole data set and discussing identified themes with my supervisor brought the analysis to a more abstract level. The refined themes were identified as: Valuing and welcoming fathers, adopting a male perspective and providing a

safe haven and secure base. In hindsight, re-approaching the data with fresh eyes and discussing them particularly contributed to a more thoughtful analysis.

The analysis and interpretation of the other study's data (study 1, paper 2) were similar to those of the study 2 (paper 3), in their move from a more generic to a more abstract level. I reviewed and analyzed the data in relation to the research question: "What are young fathers' perspectives on their experiences of teen fatherhood?" This process involved discussions with my supervisor and another member of my supervisory committee which led to a modified procedure. On flashcards, I noted codes and themes for each transcript. The codes spanned from very basic descriptors (e.g., "money", when a participant talked about money) to more conceptual levels and personal memos (e.g., "anxiety of not being able to be a provider"). If, for instance, "money" came up again in one of the following transcripts, the relevant quote was noted on the "money" card. When the code was slightly different (e.g., "materialistic needs"), a new flashcard was created. Flashcards were also used to create personal memos and overarching themes based on the noted codes. This more manipulative form of constant comparison helped me piece together a preliminary story that was then challenged and discussed in team discussion with my supervisory committee. The hands-on approach (manipulating and clustering the flashcards) was very useful to conceptualize and refine identified themes. To ensure rigor, three elements were vital to the research process of both studies: methodological purposiveness (Richards & Morse, 2007), investigator's responsiveness (Morse et al., 2002) and investigator triangulation (Patton, 2002).

Methodological purposiveness emphasizes the need for researchers to identify a research purpose, which includes reviewing the literature and reflecting and focusing on a specific research area or a specific problem. Since the purpose of the research question determines the method, for this study, the method needed to be changed from grounded theory to interpretive description to identify practice relevant problems and to generate and implement a relevant solution into immediate practice. Furthermore, investigator responsiveness is critical for the validity of the research (Morse et al., 2002). In my case, being a responsive investigator involved, for instance, remaining open and flexible (e.g., changing the research focus when it became necessary, or letting go of ideas that were interesting to me but not sufficiently supported), being creative (e.g., by using flashcards for a more reflective analysis), and reflecting on the research process to make the outcome as thoughtful and insightful as possible. Finally, investigator triangulation (Patton, 2002) through discussions with supervisors who were engaged in the data analysis added rigor through a more careful and reflective interpretation of the data.

The Papers

Paper 1: Engaging Young Fathers in Research through Photo-Interviewing

The first paper is conceptual and describes possible advantages of using photo-interviewing as a research strategy with young fathers. Since young fathers are a population that is less willing to be engaged and less likely to share personal information in research interviews, their views and experiences may be

omitted in research. This leads to young fathers' perspectives being understudied and consequently lacking in social support services and formal programming.

The first paper reports on the experiences of using photo-interviewing as a research strategy with a group of five young fathers. For the photo-interviewing component, participants were given disposable cameras and asked to take pictures of things, people, or places that made them feel like a dad or think about being a dad. Pictures were then developed and provided the basis for the interview, in which young fathers were asked to describe what they saw in the picture, why they took the picture, and/or how they felt about the picture.

Although conventional interviews are the most commonly used research strategy in qualitative research, this paper suggests that it might not be the most fitting research strategy when studying young fathers. Instead, since photo-interviewing may be less threatening to participants, adds a new (visual) dimension to the data, and can be empowering to participants by enabling them to express themselves through photographs, it is a research strategy that could facilitate the process of engaging young fathers and possibly other similar populations, in research.

Paper 2: Finding Meaning and Purpose through Fatherhood

The second paper examines young fathers' perspectives on their experiences of teen fatherhood. While a large body of research exists that examines negative consequences related to young fatherhood (e.g., financial deprivation, delinquency, and school drop out) as well as barriers that make it

difficult for young fathers to remain involved in their children's lives, the literature on positive aspects of young fatherhood remains sparse.

The purpose of this second paper is to look beyond the barriers and negative consequences related to teen fatherhood by examining the perspective of involved young fathers of their experience of being a father based on interviews with twelve participants who became fathers at the age of 21 or younger. Findings from this paper suggest that participating young fathers were a vulnerable group who experienced their young fatherhood as a wake up call to become a "better" (i.e., more responsible) person. Moreover, fathers in the study fully embraced their role as fathers and being a father brought meaning and purpose to their lives and the wish for their children to fare better. The transition to fatherhood is a critical life event in which timely support programs and targeted services are particularly necessary to support fathers in their development and in their role as responsible parent.

Paper 3: Essential Features of Programming for Young Fathers

Although young fathers have been identified as a vulnerable group that would benefit from social support, formal services and programming remain mostly targeted at young mothers, and the development of support programs for fathers has lagged behind. Furthermore, prevailing male gender ideals of being self-sufficient and the overwhelming presence of females in support providing agencies discourage fathers to seek formal support, even when support is available (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). *Terra Centre*, a non-profit agency, is

currently one of the few agencies in Western Canada that seems to be successful in reaching out and providing helpful and immediate support to young fathers.

The purpose of the third paper is to explore factors that contribute to *Terra's* success in offering services for young fathers. Based on interviews with five staff members and four (former) clients of *Terra Centre*, three key factors were identified that seemed most important in successfully providing support to young fathers: Valuing and welcoming fathers (through changes in organization and in their way of reaching out); adopting a male perspective (through adapting services to young fathers and a focus on doing); and providing a safe haven and a secure base (in form of providing safety and nurturing relationships). In order for young fathers to benefit from social support and programming, support services and enrollment need to be improved by directly targeting and then including young fathers. This paper provides suggestions for agencies on how to deliver services and support to young fathers.

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PAPER 1: ENGAGING YOUNG FATHERS IN RESEARCH THROUGH PHOTO-INTERVIEWING

Qualitative researchers aim to explore, understand, and conceptualize the experiences and perspectives of their participants, particularly participants' own interpretations of their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Richards & Morse, 2007). Interviewing seems to be the ideal data collection strategy for this endeavor, as it allows participants to express their experiences in their own words (Liamputtong, 2010). Two underlying assumptions of the interview as a data collection strategy are that participants are reasonably comfortable with a question and answer format and capable with expressing themselves verbally in such a format.

Recently, we conducted a study with young fathers and were surprised when we encountered difficulties in both recruiting and interviewing them. The purpose of this paper is to describe our experiences interviewing young fathers using both conventional interviews (characterized by one-on-one, face-to-face interaction, Johnson, 2002) and photo-interviewing (characterized by using photographs as props during an interview, Hurworth, 2003). We do not argue that one data collection strategy is necessarily better than the other, but we theorize as to why photo-interviewing may make young fathers more comfortable participating in interviews. Overall, our aim in this paper is to encourage discussion of alternative data collection strategies to engage young fathers, and possibly other similar populations, in research.

In the following, we describe the challenges we encountered using conventional interviews with young fathers. We then describe photo-interviewing by positioning it within the context of other popular visual methods. Lastly, we share our observations of the possible benefits of photo-interviewing for conducting research with young fathers.

Our Experiences Interviewing Young Fathers

Young fathers have often faced challenges that make sharing their experiences difficult and undesirable. Young fathers may come from unstable and low-income families (Devault et al., 2008), lack the resources to financially provide for their children (Mollborn, 2007), and experience social stigma and marginalization (Weber, 2012). Understanding this, we created an environment that we thought would make it appealing for young fathers to speak with us. For example, we established a close relationship with the support agency that worked with the young fathers, we let them choose if they wanted their outreach worker present during the interview, we obtained consent orally, no printed interview guide was used, and we used a casual interviewing style, taking participants' leads whenever possible. Although the interviews went reasonably well, the experience left a sense of dissatisfaction with the interviewer. Why?

Although the literature is scarce, some researchers have addressed men's unwillingness to participate in research. While the private sphere (e.g., fathering) has been recognized as a domain that discourages participation in a study in general (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), men are even less likely to engage in research concerning personal experiences of their private lives than women (Butera, 2006;

Oliffe & Mroz, 2005). Butera (2006) describes her difficulties to recruit men and women for a study on friendship as follows: “female participants tended to appear without effort; however, recruiting men became tantamount to a full-time job” (p. 1267).

Men’s hesitance to volunteer for research studies that inquire into personal experiences stems from a perceived threat to their masculinity: “It is a threat inasmuch as an interviewer controls the interaction, asks questions that put these elements of manly self-portrayal into doubt, and does not simply affirm a man’s masculinity displays” (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001, p. 91). “To agree to sit for an interview, no matter how friendly and conversational, is to give up some control and to risk having one’s public persona stripped away” (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001, p. 91).

Although gender differences influence the interview process (Pini, 2005; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001), interviewing men is not necessarily easier when the researchers are men themselves. Oliffe and Mroz, two male researchers who interviewed over 100 male participants, describe interviewing men as “a daunting task”, particularly when it comes to “private matters” (2005, p. 257). Moreover, research suggests that men are even more hesitant to share their experiences when they assume they lack expertise in the area of study (Oliffe & Mroz, 2005).

Adolescent males are thought to be even more reluctant to talk about their experiences (Dumesnil & Dorval, 1989; Hutchinson, Marsiglio, & Cohan, M., 2002). Coleman and Dennison, who reviewed research on teen parenthood,

warned: "[I]t is important not to underestimate the difficulty of involving young men in the research process. They may be suspicious of an unknown interviewer, or lacking in confidence in respect of their role" (1998, p. 311). Hutchinson et al. (2002) described the experience of interviewing male adolescents (age 16 and 21) as the feeling of "pulling teeth" (p. 50). The skill to express personal feelings and ideas in longer accounts increases with age. This phenomenon was observed in interventions with adolescents, which Dumesnil and Dorval (1989) summarized as follows: "We routinely observe group leaders treating young adolescents as though they were able to do 'personal talking.' We had had that expectation ourselves. Such inappropriate expectations can only limit the effectiveness of interventions designed for younger adolescents" (p. 223).

Although some of the young fathers we interviewed seemed fine with this 'personal talking' we simply assumed, like Dumesnil and Dorval (1989), our conventional interviewing strategy would be sufficient. When we realized that the interviews could be improved, we asked ourselves, "What can we do to make it easier for young fathers to speak with us"? We turned to the literature on visual methods to help us decide.

Visual Methods

Visual methods, particularly those employing photographs, have increased in popularity in social research (Liamputtong, 2007; Pain, 2012) as ways to elicit, contextualize, or collect data related to complex social problems (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008, Reavey, 2011). Although data sources for research include film clips, media images, and comics,

photos are most frequently used as a data collection strategy (e.g., photo interview), or within a particular method (e.g., photo elicitation, photovoice). The use of photos seems to be an easy and affordable way to explore and elicit participants' experiences and offers opportunities to enrich the quality of data (Harper, 2002; Pink, 2009) as well as participants' overall experiences engaging in research (Wang, 1999, 2006).

Photo-interviewing, Photo-elicitation, Fotonovela, and Photovoice

Photo-interviewing is the generic term that refers to the data collection strategy of using photographs during a research interview (Hurworth, 2003). The three most common visual methods that use photo-interviewing are photo elicitation, fotonovela (also: photo novella), and photovoice.

Photo-elicitation has its roots in anthropology and sociology, and uses photos to explore unknown populations, cultures, or settings (Harper, 2002). The goal is to generate good discussion by eliciting emotions, memories, and unconscious information (Harper, 2002; Purcell, 2009). In photo-elicitation studies, researchers typically select photographs or other pictures (comics, drawings, or other visuals, etc.) to elicit and compare participants' reactions to the visual stimuli (Henwood, Shirani & Finn, 2011). However, some researchers have used photographs taken by participants themselves in photo-elicitation research (e.g., Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012).

Fotonovela is a form of visual storytelling that uses photographs to build a story similar to a comic book. Although the term fotonovela has also been used in public health education (e.g., Waldman et al., 2010), it mainly refers to an

arts-based research method that uses images or photo-collages to help participants to express and share their experiences. Pictures are either taken by participants themselves or by the researchers who photograph participants during the enactment of an experience (Kirova & Emme, 2008, 2009).

Photovoice was initially coined and promoted by Wang (1999, 2006) and stems from participatory action research (PAR) and community-based research (CBR). In contrast to the other visual methods presented in this paper, photovoice is a method to explore and understand collective problems from a grassroots level. Community members, stakeholders, and researchers collaborate to identify and change social, political or health issues in a specific community (Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi & Pula, 2009). By having participants talking, sharing, and discussing their own pictures, photovoice captures the viewpoint of participants with the goal to empower marginalized groups and raise awareness of deficits within a community (Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Wang, 1999). The initiative to identify issues within the community and facilitate change is community-, rather than, investigator-driven.

Since photovoice is a recommended method for engaging youth in research (Wang, 2006, p. 156), we initially considered using photovoice to engage our population of young fathers. But since the agency through which we recruited young fathers advised us that male clients are less likely to participate in group activities than their female counterparts, we chose a hybrid of photovoice and photo elicitation: We asked participants to take their own pictures (as in photovoice), but instead of group discussions, we decided to use

participants' photos as props during one-on-one interviews (as in photo elicitation).

We provided five young fathers disposable cameras and asked them to take pictures of things, people, or places that "made them feel like a dad or think about being a dad". Pictures were then developed and provided the basis for the interview in which participants were asked to describe what they saw in the picture, why they took the picture, and/or how they felt about the picture. Participants kept the pictures as a keepsake after the interview.

Our Observations of Possible Advantages of Photo-interviewing

From our perspective, the use of photos during data collection may have three important advantages over conventional interviews that rely on words alone. First, using photos has the potential to make participants more comfortable; second, it may enhance the quality of the data, and; third, it may create a sense of agency within participants. We provide literature on the use of photos in research to posit why this may be the case.

More Comfortable

First, photo-interviewing may have made the fathers more comfortable. Conventional interviewing can be seen as researcher-led (the researcher starts the interview, often following a guide with probes) and is usually set up so that interviewer and participant sit opposite of each other, face-to-face, with a certain amount of eye contact (Johnson, 2002). In contrast, photo-interviewing is participant-led. Our participants chose what pictures to take and, although they

were asked to describe the picture and the meaning, no other sensitive or personal questions were asked. Further, the parallel style where the researcher and the participant sat side-by-side, with the pictures between them, seemed to make the young fathers more comfortable to engage in a conversation. In a photo-elicitation study with children, Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel (2006) similarly reported that using photographs as props contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere and to a better rapport between researcher and participant. The researchers theorized that the use of photographs diminished power differences and acted as an icebreaker: "It allowed us to invite the children to take the lead in the interview [and] the photos created a relaxed atmosphere" (Epstein et al., 2006, p. 8).

Further, our assumption that young male participants may prefer a parallel style conversation in contrast to a face-to-face conversation is reflected in a study in which Tannen (1990) analyzed video-tapes of conversations of groups of three. She observed important differences between male and female participants:

> At every age, the girls and women sit closer to each other and look at each other directly. At every age, the boys and men sit at angles to each other – in one case, almost parallel – and never look directly into each other's faces. I developed the term *anchoring gaze* to describe this visual home base. The girls and women anchor their gaze on each other's faces, occasionally glancing away, while

> the boys and men anchor their gaze elsewhere in the room, occasionally glancing at each other. (p. 246)

Although Tannen (1990) observed groups of three in conversations, the difference between the direct contact (eye contact and face-to-face) among girls and the indirect contact among boys is noteworthy. From this perspective, the conventional interview accommodates a female style of conversation, while the photo-interviewing allows an *anchoring gaze* on the pictures, which is more in line with a male tendency.

In other words, although the young fathers did share experiences and information during the conventional interview, they seemed to be considerably more comfortable with the focus (participant-led instead of researcher-led) and the setting (side-by-side instead of face-to-face) of photo-interviewing.

Enhancing the Quality of Data

Second, the use of pictures may have enhanced the quality of the data as they provided context and introduced new aspects of fathers' parenthood including important family members and special places, such as their homes and neighbourhoods. The conventional interviews lacked these important contextual and unforeseen elements. For instance, based on their photos, fathers talked about support they received (e.g., pictures of their grandmother or other family members), barriers they experienced (e.g., taking pictures of clothes they wanted but could not buy for their child because of their financial situation), and visions for their future (e.g, taking pictures of landscapes or houses that they wished for their children in the future).

Photographs may convey important contextual information that enables both the participants and the researchers to situate and specify participants' experiences (Pain, 2012; Wang, 1999; 2006). The way that an image is able to frame place and time provides context to an experience that "speaks to us" (Harper, 2002). Furthermore, using visuals such as photographs can enhance the quality of the data by accessing "sensory representations" of participants' lives and experiences (Pink, 2009). Images elicit different sensory reactions and memories, as they "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Although participants shared personal information with us in the conventional interview, the use of photos provided additional contextual information that was absent from the conventional interviews.

However, there could be a potential limitation of photo-interviewing on the quality of the data. The participant-led photo-interviews focused strongly on the positive aspects of fatherhood, in which participants were naturally more interested in presenting positive facets of themselves and their experiences. In contrast, the conventional interview focused on both positive and negative aspects of fatherhood (e.g., what do you like best about being a dad? What are the challenges of being a dad?), including unfavorable actions on their part and traumatic life events, which was also important to hear and understand.

Agency

Third, having participants take pictures of what made them think of being a dad or feel like a dad seemed to give them a sense of agency. As an "invisible" population, adolescent fathers are not often given a "voice" and hence are limited in their self-representation (Ashbourne, 2006). Teen fathers are predominately portrayed as "deadbeat dads" in the literature (Glikman, 2004) and have little opportunities to present their own views on their experience of being a teen father: "[T]een fathers are charged with negotiating the stigma associated with having a child off-time and out of wedlock; (…) trying to reestablish their reputations as (…) 'good guys'" (Weber, 2012, p. 917). In this regard, participants seemed pleased with their pictures. For instance, Pat (age 21) proudly showed his album and described his pictures to several staff members at the support agency. Marcus (age 19) a participant whose first language was not English, commented on how he enjoyed taking pictures as a way of expressing himself. He said, "I feel good. I could show what I wanted. It was a good experience, because when I want to express [myself] and my language is not good, I feel like people are not getting my message".

To express one's own beliefs and opinions is something that many of us take for granted. Based on the belief that any individual needs to be able to express him or herself in the social world (Arendt, 1959), marginalized or disenfranchised populations such as young fathers are usually not given the chance to present themselves the way they perceive themselves (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Thus, the opportunity for participants to take and discuss their

own pictures enabled them to present their experiences in their own way and may have given them a sense of agency.

Conclusion

Although conventional interviewing seems to have become the default data collection strategy in qualitative research, our experiences suggest that it may not facilitate young fathers' engagement in research. Similar to young fathers, other populations who are less verbal or marginalized may find it difficult to engage in one-on-one and face-to-face interviewing and may not consent to participate in conventional interviews. But how meaningful or relevant is research based on data that excludes the experiences of those who are underrepresented, hesitant, uncomfortable, or not verbal enough to participate in in-depth interviews? Too often, marginalized yet critical perspectives are absent from our research. What can we do to enable those who have typically not participated in research more willing to do so?

In this paper, we reflected on our experiences of using conventional interviews and photo-interviewing as data collection strategies with young fathers and concluded that photo-interviewing may make young fathers more comfortable, may enrich the quality of the data, and may provide them a sense of agency. Overall, our aim in this paper was to encourage discussion of alternative data collection strategies to engage young fathers, and possibly similar populations in research. This points us to a relatively new methodological theory, the *theory of technique*. The *theory of technique* refers to "all the tactical choices made in the research implementation" (Graffigna, Bosio, & Olson, 2008,

p. 268). The *theory of technique* suggests that choices in the research process, such as setting and research strategy, influence the findings and the quality of the data (Bosio, Graffigna, & Lozza, 2008). In our case, how young fathers felt about their interviewing experience, how they engaged in each research strategy, and the quality of data differed depending on the data collection strategy employed. Moreover, the *theory of technique* likely affects participants' engagement, as they may find some research strategies (e.g., conventional interviews) more daunting than others. Thus, we encourage readers to think about their *theory of technique* (i.e., setting and data collection strategy) before and during the planning and implementation of their research, due to the substantial impact it has on the entire research process.

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PAPER 2: TEEN FATHERHOOD AGAINST THE ODDS: FINDING MEANING AND PURPOSE THROUGH FATHERHOOD

A substantive body of research has identified that father involvement is beneficial for children's outcomes, mothers' well-being, and fathers' social and emotional development. First, there is strong evidence that father involvement has an overall positive influence on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Dubowitz et al., 2001). Children with involved fathers are happier, more socially competent, and more successful academically than children who grow up without involved fathers (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth & Lamb, 2000). In contrast, father absence in childhood is an important risk factor that increases the likelihood for children and adolescents to live in poverty, become a teen parent, or run into conflicts with the law (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). Ellis and his colleagues (2003), for instance, found that girls who grow up without a father figure show the earliest sexual activity and the highest rate of teen pregnancy, a rate seven times higher than girls with a positive father figure (Ellis et al., 2003).

Second, beyond the benefits for children's development, father involvement has also been demonstrated to have positive implications for the coparent's (the child's mother's) well-being. Fathers' provision of money and time directly affects how much time and money mothers need to invest in child rearing (England & Folbre, 2002). Some mothers face the challenges of economic uncertainty and sole responsibility for their children and are more likely to be dependent on social support services and to live in poverty. Others

receive regular financial support from their child(ren)'s father and are able to share some of the responsibilities and duties involved in raising a child. This, in turn, is related to child's positive development and well being, since involved fathers are not only emotionally invested but also more likely to provide economic support to mother and child (Dunn, 2004; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

Third, father involvement also contributes to fathers' own emotional and social development and sense of well-being (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Palkovitz, 2002). Research findings reveal that the transition to fatherhood significantly influences men's thinking, behaviour, and self-concept (Settersten & Cancel-Tirado, 2010). Involved fathers have been found to be happier, more engaged in the community, and less likely to be unemployed (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Palkovitz, for instance, suggests that "[f]athers' involvement with their children provides a pervasive and rich context for developmental change and maturity that is distinct from and that provides different developmental outcomes from not being an actively involved father" (2002, p. 3).

In summary, father involvement positively impacts children's, mothers', and fathers' overall development and well-being. Unfortunately, in North America, an increasing number of children grow up without their fathers (Department of Justice in Canada, 2004; Livingston & Parker, 2011). Although new trends from the U.S. show that overall fathers are more actively involved in their children's lives than a generation ago, more fathers also are completely absent from their children's lives (Livingston & Parker, 2011). The risk of growing up without any father figure is particularly high for children of teen

parents (Marsiglio, 1987; Scott, Steward-Streng, Manlove & Moore, 2012). Recent American statistics found that 56% of teen fathers were not living with their child when they became a father, which decreases the chances of being involved in their child's life later on (Scott et al., 2012).

Although research has found that teen fathers want to be involved in child rearing (Shannon & Abrams, 2007), only a small percentage end up staying in touch with their children (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Rhein et al., 1997). According to Parke (1996) young fathers do not consciously decide whether they want to be involved or not. Rather, their involvement is determined by the interplay of evolving internal and external factors related to their fatherhood. Besides facing the same obstacles as "adult" fathers, such as lack of role models (Daly, 1993) and maternal gatekeeping (McBride et al., 2000), many additional barriers have been found to be related to teen fatherhood such as economic and educational deprivation (Mollborn, 2007; Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, Glebova, & Glade, 2006; Thornberry, Smith, & Howard, 1997), lack of knowledge about childcare (Rhein et al., 1997), conflict with the law (Shannon & Abrams, 2007), and unstable relationships with the mothers of their children (Marsiglio, 1987; Scott et al., 2012; Thornberry et al., 1997).

Research on teen fatherhood has mostly focused on these barriers that prevent young fathers to be involved in their children's lives (e.g., Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Mollborn, 2007; Rhein et al., 1997), but studies on teen fathers' experiences and own perspectives of their parenthood remain scarce. Very little is known about what contributes to young fathers' involvement and even less

about what kind of support they need to remain involved in their children's lives. Despite a notable increase in research on young fatherhood, very little is known about intentions, expectations, and the meaning of fatherhood for adolescent fathers (Shade, Kools, Weiss, & Pinderhughes, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to examine young fathers' perspectives of their experiences of being a father.

Methods

Qualitative methods are most suitable where "insider" information is necessary to better understand a complex social phenomenon at a deeper level (Richards & Morse, 2007). This study employed interpretive description (Thorne, 2008) as a method to explore young fathers' perspectives on their experiences of teen fatherhood. Interpretive description builds on and incorporates existing knowledge of a topic and uses participants' experiences and perceptions to identify themes and patterns. The result is "a coherent conceptual description" (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004, p. 7), " that is generated on the basis of informed questioning, using techniques of reflective, critical examination, and which will ultimately guide and inform disciplinary thought in some manner" (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004, p. 6).

Participants

Twelve participants who became fathers between the ages of 14 and 21 took part in semi-structured interviews. All fathers were recruited through two Western Canadian non-profit organizations that provide services to young or vulnerable parents. Fathers in emotional crisis or those considered too vulnerable

to be interviewed were screened out by agency staff and not approached to be part of the study. At the time of the interviews, fathers were between 16 and 25 years of age. Eight fathers had one child (two of the eight were expecting a second at the time of the interview), and four fathers had two children (one of those four suspected that he was the biological father of a third child but this was not confirmed during the study). Children were between the ages of 1 month and 5 years. Half of the fathers lived with their child and the mother of the child, and half of the fathers were separated from the child's mother. None of the fathers had sole custody, but all fathers had some form of regular contact with their children.

Procedures

Participants were told by the researcher that the goal of the study was to learn more about teenage fathers and about what it was like being a young dad. All participants gave verbal consent prior to beginning the first interview. Interviews were held in a private room at one of the agencies, at participants' homes, or at a nearby park. Interviews started with the question: "Please tell me a little bit about yourself". This broad question was intended to build rapport, to give participants liberty and flexibility in describing their experiences, and to prompt them to take the lead regarding the direction of the interview (Duffy, Ferguson & Watson, 2003). Participants were then asked about their circumstances and their day-to-day life (e.g. current situation, how many children, custody arrangement, and typical routines). In the main part of the interview, fathers were asked about their experiences of being a father, including

what they enjoyed most and what they found most challenging about being a father. With the intention of ending the interview on a positive focus, fathers were asked what they wished for their child's future. Interviews were between 20 and 90 minutes long. With participants' agreement, interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed verbatim.

Led by the first author, with feedback from co-authors in team discussion to identify and reconcile different perspectives and interpretations of the data, data were analyzed in three stages. Each transcript was initially reviewed to identify and note codes, preliminary themes, and analytic memos (open coding). In subsequent review, codes and themes related to the research questions were identified: '"What are young fathers' perspectives on their experiences of teen fatherhood?" The process of conceptualizing, challenging, and refining themes and subthemes collectively in a team ensured rigor as it strengthened the analysis and minimized common risks of qualitative analysis, such as premature, superficial, or preconceived coding (Richards & Morse, 2007; Thorne, 2008). To protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, audio files and transcripts were identified by number codes only. Further, pseudonyms were used for all references to participants, including when citing their comments.

Findings and Discussion

Four major themes emerged from the analyses related to young fathers' experiences of fatherhood: Difficult childhood history; barriers to responsible father involvement; fatherhood as a turning point; and finding purpose and

meaning through fatherhood. These four themes are discussed with subthemes in the following.

Difficult Childhood History

One major theme that emerged from young fathers' accounts was their difficult childhood history. Since participants were not specifically asked or probed about their childhood, it was noteworthy that they grounded their descriptions and experiences of being a father in their own experiences (or lack thereof) of being fathered or parented. Two subthemes were identified: Lacking a loving or responsive caregiver and dealing with trauma.

Lacking a loving or responsive caregiver: "No one was there for me". Although a few fathers reported that they ran away from home due to family conflict and either lived on the streets or in an institutionalized group home for a period of time, the majority lived with at least one of their parents (usually their mother). One major component of their difficult childhood history was the feeling of not having had anybody in childhood who "was there for them". Pat, for instance, lived with his abusive step-father and saw his birth-father once or twice a year during holidays. His mother was "almost never there, like mentally, and sometimes physically". Craig lived with both parents, but said:

> I had my mom and dad but they were never really there. My mom was either drunk or [my father] was either stoned or not there. Or you know [both were] drunk and stoned. And, it was not a really great environment to bring myself up in.

It was striking that only two of the twelve fathers who participated in this study reported having had a positive relationship with their fathers, whereas most participants reported a lack of a positive father figure in their lives. Several participants were rejected by their fathers or did not have any contact with them. Several participants experienced strained or abusive relationships with their fathers. For instance, Edward said about his father: "I basically hate him (…), he's not a good person, really." Other participants maintained some contact with their own fathers or lived with them, but felt that they were not emotionally available to them. Devon recalled:

> [M]y dad was on the road. And when he'd come off the road, he'd either be drunk or passed out, so. It was very interesting to come home and see the Highway truck there and, 'Dad's home! Dad's home!' and then to find out that he's passed out and that he's gone the next morning when we wake up. It was like 'oh, okay'. He'd wake up [my sisters] to say good bye, but he'd never say good-bye to me.

The majority of participants not only lacked a father figure but often also a mother or *any* responsive caregiver. Although a few fathers reported having grandparents who tried to serve as parental figures, most fathers felt that nobody in their family was there for them. Michael, for instance, summed the relationship with his family as follows: "There's nobody in my family I want to be close to". Research on "adult" fathers suggests that fathers who have experienced a lack of paternal role models or had strained relationships with

their own fathers are often concerned about how to function as appropriate role models to their own children (Daly, 1993). The experiences of young fathers in this study are consistent with the research literature in that often adolescent fathers have grown up without any father figure (Furstenberg & Weiss, 2000; Thornberry et al., 1997) and witnessed negative behavior such as paternal drug use, violence, or gang involvement (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). The theme of lacking a loving or responsive caregiver is consistent with the growing evidence that young men who grow up without a positive father figure are more likely to become young fathers themselves (Kiselica, 2008; Sipsma, Biello, Cole-Lewis, & Kershaw, 2010).

Dealing with trauma: "What stressed me before has an affect on me now". Many young fathers explicitly reported or described experiences that revealed painful or traumatic events in their childhood. During the interviews, unfavorable experiences usually were raised spontaneously by participants as they talked about what they wished for their children or how they wanted their children to grow up. Craig, for instance, shared that he wanted to make every effort to have his children see their mother who had temporarily withdrawn from her parental responsibilities. His rationale was: "I of all people know how hard it is growing up without, you know, solidified parents (…) considering the household I came from, it's a miracle I'm not a gun-toting sociopath". Some fathers described their own fathers or stepfathers as physically abusive. Devon experienced his father as "abusive and controlling":

> From the age of 11 to about 14, I would go to school with black eyes, bleeding noses, bandages from head to toe. I would always have to say that I walked into a door (…) [but] [i]t was my dad being drunk and angry.

Many of the fathers described different forms of parental drug abuse in their home. Others had painful memories of threatening or dangerous situations that were very frightening for them. Taylor, for instance, shared a frightening memory of when he was five years old:

> My mom is schizo and the schizo switch turned on. And the room I was sleeping in, she climbed up on the outside out on the rails or whatever, she lit one of the curtains on fire. And I was in that room.

Another father, Cormac, reported how he still suffers from anxiety and stress because of his experiences in childhood. He recalled spending long periods of time at home as a pre-schooler not knowing where his mother was, or when she would come home, while his mother was out working as a prostitute. In the interview, he reflected on the after effects of those experiences:

> I had a lot of like lonely issues. Like my mom would leave me a lot and I'd have to, you know, wait; and so my anxiety, I think for the most part my anxiety built up then (…) And yeah, just my childhood was really bad and I told [my partner] you know, a lot of my anxiety has to come from that. So, it's not what's stressing me now, it's just what stressed me before has an effect on me now.

(…) Something in my brain just clicks (…) I just wish I could not have to deal with the stress anymore.

The lack of a responsive parental figure in childhood and the trauma and stress experienced early in life are considered childhood adversities that are known to be strongly associated with mental health problems in adolescence and adulthood (Green et al., 2010; Scott, Varghese, McGrath, 2010). Accordingly, it was not surprising that participants reported being diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), struggling with school and having strained relationships with families and friends.

Barriers to Responsible Father Involvement

A second theme that emerged was the barriers to responsible fatherhood experienced by participants. This theme consisted of three subthemes: lack of education and the ability to provide financially, involvement in a high-risk lifestyle, and marginalization as young fathers (i.e., lack of acknowledgement of their role as father and lack of formal programming and support).

Lack of education and ability to provide financially. One of the biggest barriers for young fathers was a lack of education and not being able to financially support their family. Young fathers were well aware of the disadvantage of not having completed school and the related social discrimination. Michael, for instance, said, “It was hard. (…) being young, (…) I dropped out of school at a young age, but uh, … I still don’t have very much of an education, but I’m not stupid.”

One of the fathers who disengaged from the mother of his children, described how his failure to provide lead to the break-up of his relationship with the mother of his child. Connor said:

> I was doing what we agreed on. I'd buy diapers, stuff like that. And she started asking for quite a bit of money and I didn't have it at that time. I told her that and she's like 'kay fine'. She hung up. Two weeks later I give her a call and she told me that she didn't want me around.

Research suggests that fathers who provide financial support are more likely to be involved, especially when they are not married and do not live with their children (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Johnson, 2001).

Involvement in a high-risk life style. The lack of ability to financially provide often was related to a high-risk life style that involved homelessness, criminal activities, and drug addictions. Being connected to the drug scene and without prospects of adequate education or employment, several young fathers in the study reported their involvement in this high-risk life style increased when they dropped out of school. To them, selling drugs seemed (at the time) the only option open to them to generate an income. Drugs were not only sold, but also consumed, which lead to greater problems, as Taylor described how, after dropping out of school, his involvement with drugs and alcohol increased:

> I was still selling dope. Oh yeah, then I started drinking (…) I became a real, real bad alcoholic after that. (…) I used to blackout every night just to ignore life (…) I started snorting coke and

> throwing parties when I shouldn't have been and went into ambulances (…) it was rough. I just drank myself stupid every night. And I did that for a long time and then went into rehab for drinking and what not, that sucked. I was going through withdrawal and that really sucked. It sucked.

According to previous research, the pressure to provide financially leads some young fathers onto the path of delinquency. Especially in impoverished neighborhoods, selling drugs seems the only visible option for some young fathers to financially contribute (Feigelman, Stanton, & Ricardo, 1993). Paradoxically, because of the financial income through drug trafficking, drug involvement enhances fathers' likeliness to be involved in child rearing unless the father ends up in prison (Shannon & Abrams, 2007; Rhein et al., 1997).

Marginalization of young fathers. In a society in which economic security is held in high regards, it is very difficult for young fathers who do not complete secondary level school (i.e., high school) to develop a healthy sense of self-worth and self-confidence. Similar to teen mothers, the response young fathers get from society and from their immediate social environment, such as from their (ex)partner's family, is not positive. Fathers were marginalized from their proximate environment by a lack of acknowledgement of their role as father as well as the lack of formal support and programming. Several fathers reported that their partner's parents suggested that their partner either terminate the pregnancy or give up the child for adoption. Fathers were annoyed that their (potential) in-laws interfered with their partner's pregnancy and their romantic

relationship, and, in general, how their partner's parents treated them and their partner. Edward, for instance, reported frequent conflicts with his in-laws:

> [Her mother] basically treats us still like kids (…) I don't like that. (…) I want to be treated like a normal person, not looked down on or anything. Her mom does that (…) She'll say really mean stuff to [my partner], basically putting her down.

The lack of acknowledgement from family members and society in general of being a parent made it difficult for fathers to grow into the father role and feel good as fathers. For instance, Taylor, who spent 14 months in prison, shared that he did not feel like a father during that time, because prison made him feel empty and worthless, and he felt he could not share with anybody there that he had become a father: "Usually you keep quiet (…) no one cares. You can't really express with anyone that 'yeah, I'm a father!' 'Cause no one cares".

Other fathers who were not involved in illegal activities, gang membership or drug abuse, nevertheless commented on how difficult it was to face societal prejudices from family and strangers. People thought of teen parents as "being bad influences" who "are going to fail at it" (Connor). Craig emphasized:

> We're not all bad. I'm going to try and assault that stereotype a little bit. Not all of us are bad. There are those select few that decide: 'I can do this, I'm ready.' Because I've come across one too many people that say 'don't you wish you could just go back and put that condom on?' (…) I actually take a great deal of offense to

> it ‘cause I feel there’s like nothing else I’d be doing without my children.

Since fathers were recruited from non-for profit agencies, most of them received some form of support from their agency, such as help with finances, housing, emotional support, or parent education. Although fathers cherished and valued this support, it became evident that the support that a single non-profit organization offered was not sufficient to provide young fathers with the support that they needed. Besides facing concrete barriers to responsible fatherhood from no access to housing, schooling, or lack of financial help, fathers also struggled with asking for help and felt that they should be able to take care of their situation. Cormac described this conflict as follows:

> I guess I was just full of pride, rather than asking for help. Yeah, just ‘cause I didn’t want to admit, like, that I was worried about this. I thought if I showed that I can handle this that I really could. But inside I was really like just crying a lot. (…) [I] didn’t know what to do at all. You got such a big responsibility on you and you’re just a little guy.

Growing into a positive father role and role model for their own children seems to be particularly difficult for young fathers who are in the developmental stage of adolescence in which they are exploring and forming a sense of identity, have more serious intimate relationships, and emancipate themselves from their family of origin (Aries, 2001). During this stage that is typically characterized by turmoil and confusion, participants in this study experienced little stability in

their lives as they struggled with the legacy of considerable childhood adversities. The young fathers in this study had personal histories that included lack of a responsive caregiver and traumatic experiences in childhood, and faced a variety of other social barriers such as school drop-out, lack of resources, and delinquency to their efforts to become responsible fathers.

Fatherhood as a Turning Point: "The Wake Up Call"

The transition to fatherhood was a wake up call for the young fathers in this study to try to resolve personal issues and become responsible as a parent, or as Devon put it: "To finally wake up and be a parent". This third theme included two subthemes: Rejecting a high-risk life style, and a new identity.

Rejecting a high-risk life style. In this study, fathers described their transition to fatherhood in a way that suggests considerable shifts in rejecting their high-risk life style. The changes they described influenced their development positively, such as making them more mature and choosing a healthier lifestyle, despite (or because of) multiple adversities and barriers. Craig described his development from "a mess" to "more mature":

> [A]s cliché as it sounds, fatherhood has kind of matured me a little more than it probably should have, but I'm all right with it. I think that's just fine. I look back now at how I acted years prior, and I see the kids, the teenagers – I'm sorry – in my class today, and I think, wow, I was retarded. Just a mess.

Within this context of maturing, fathers described several changes they consciously made to improve their lifestyle, such as taking better care of

themselves, having a stable living situation, and quitting some of their behaviours they felt were not compatible with their role as fathers (e.g., drinking and other drugs). Michael described this change of lifestyle as follows:

> [B]efore (…) [my son] was born, I was drinking all the time, I was heavy into weed, marihuana, and (…) constantly living on the streets, 'cause the way I grew up. But uh, after he was born, I stopped drinking, and I changed my whole appearance (…) trying to improve my lifestyle, I wanted him to have a better lifestyle than I did, and a better childhood than I did, so yeah, that's what was going on.

Fatherhood was further an impulse to leave the path of delinquency and to lead a more settled lifestyle. Devon, for instance, made it very clear that the birth of his son marked the end of his career as a successful drug dealer and his decision to stop living on the streets:

> That's why I stopped. I was, I could've been one of the best guys out there, but I decided to stop (…). Because of my son, I stopped. It's the whole reason why I stopped being a street kid too, was my son.

The finding that fathers rejected their high-risk lifestyle to lead a more stable and settled lifestyle is consistent with previous studies that found that the transition to fatherhood marks a "turning point" away from teen fathers' deviant to a more responsible lifestyle (Devault, Deslauriers, Groulx, & Sévigny, 2010; Glikman, 2004; Shannon & Abrams, 2007).

A new identity. The new identity as father contributed to fathers feeling "better" about themselves. Devon stated that his son motivated him to be a better person, not only by putting an end to his living on the streets and selling drugs, but also by prompting him to deal with his anger issues: "I see having a kid helps with anger issues (…) 'Cause I was a very angry kid (…) it's helped me to get over a lot of anger issues and problems."

The new responsibility as a father entailed the wish to be a positive role model for their own child, often a role model that the young fathers did not have themselves growing up. Young fathers were aware that it was important to provide healthy alternatives for children in order to guide them into the "right" direction. Taylor envisioned:

> I want to be like a role model. I want to get him into the right areas, get him into sports. Show him the other side of life, right? (…) I hope that [my son] doesn't have the same problems as me. But he might, you never know. I'm going to try and steer him [the other] way. Drugs and booze and partying, there's more fun than that.

Young fathers realized that their social environment needed to change in order for them to provide a different lifestyle for their children. Fathers concluded that the peer group they had identified with did not seem compatible with their "new" identity as a father. Some fathers described how they broke with their life in a gang or left social circles where people were involved in criminal activities. Others decided to look for new friends that they felt were more suitable for their children or they chose to try to connect with other parents.

Michael, for instance, described how he was very careful in choosing the kind of people he wanted to have around his children:

> [I] barely have friends anymore {{*chuckles*}}. Just because they are all pot-heads and bad examples, like people I don't want to hang around my kids. Especially from my side of the family, they are all a bunch of alcoholics, and ex-bikers, and stuff like that, so. (…) I don't want him growing up near, I guess, near bikers and stuff like that, 'cause I did. (…) I just try to make new friends around people he can hang out with.

Finding Purpose and Meaning through Fatherhood

The fourth theme that emerged in the study was finding purpose and meaning in life through fatherhood with two subthemes: Making up for own childhood and orienting to others. Despite the experienced struggles and barriers, young fathers expressed collectively that their fatherhood brought meaning or purpose to their lives. Becoming a father profoundly changes a man's life and is a life transition that is known to intensify or shift the focus of life's purpose and meaning (Palkovitz, 2002). The need for purpose and meaning in life is a central motivation of human nature (Frankl, 1969; Tengan, 1999). Viktor Frankl's premise is that one finds meaning by striving for a goal or a purpose even if it is obstructed by cost, tension, and struggle. Frankl is the founder of logotherapy, which refers to "therapy through meaning" (Frankl, 1978, p. 19).

Making up for own childhood. Frankl's approach to consider meaning in life as a fundamental goal for humans corresponds with the predominant theme of young fathers who described that their fatherhood and their children

made their life meaningful. Craig experienced a shift in his identity when he held his children for the first time:

> I feel there's like nothing else I'd be doing … without my children (…) I really like an old saying I heard: 'the mother becomes the mother when she hears her child cry, and the father knows he's a father when he holds his child'. And, it kind of hit me pretty hard holding both of my children. I couldn't exactly turn away.

Other fathers described the meaning of their children in more existential terms. They saw their children as something that held them in this world and made them a better person. Michael, for instance, shared that: "If it wasn't for them, I'd probably go insane".

Participants in this study did not have a negative connotation of being a young father, in contrast to both the academic and the public discourses that predominantly interpret and discuss teen fatherhood as an "unplanned and undesirable event" (Dubeau, 2002, p. 20). In fact, none of the participants regretted becoming a father and several explicitly stated that they wanted and had planned to have a family. For example, Cormac said:

> [W]e decided to have a baby. And that really, I guess, filled the void in my heart. You know what I mean, just knowing that me and [my girl-friend] loved each other so much that we could bring a baby into this love. And it would be the complete opposite of what I had before (…) it's just, like, I need a family around me. I can't be the lonely guy. I was the lonely guy through my childhood. (…)

> I just wanted my family around me. Any family. A family. (…) Life is happy, not sad like it was before. So it's a lot different.

On first impression, it might seem irrational for young fathers to bring a baby into the world, given the difficult experiences and circumstances they had faced. However, on closer examination, fathering a child created purpose and meaning that seemed almost to be perceived by these young men as a last opportunity for them to prove themselves and to fill a void they had experienced much of their life.

Orienting to others. When young fathers were asked what they wanted for their child in the future, most emphasized that they wished their children would not make the mistakes they had made. They had hopes and dreams for their children to fare better, including not having to worry about money, having a good job, and going to college. These aspirations for their children, however, were not completely unselfish, as Michael's response suggests:

> I: If you think of your kids in ten years. What would you wish for them?
>
> Michael: To have an education like I didn't. (…) I would like for my son to have his high school diploma and if he wants to go to college, I'll be behind him going to college (…) I just want him to grow up and be a success. To have a better lifestyle than I did. So when he grows up he can support me.

Other fathers described changes in their identity that indicated a beginning shift in focus toward others around them, instead of exclusively on

themselves. Taylor described this shift from himself to others through an experience when he was in prison:

> Well, I read the bible (…) I think a message from God probably hit me, real hard when I was in jail, when I was in the hole reading the bible. I kinda learned, you know, I'd rather try and help people (…) And I want to be more helpful to my family and my neighbours.

This idea of betterment by caring for others around them is also reflected by Devon, who regretted some of his actions and was worried that his son would embark on a similar path:

> There wasn't that part of my brain that said "no". I was at the top of the world. I could do what I wanted. I had the anger to back me up to make me do what I wanted. I started being a bad kid. It's rough looking back on my life now, knowing the damages I've caused. And the families I've ruined. So – I don't want to see my son go through that.

These two quotes mark a shift of focus from self to others and a certain degree of reflectivity regarding the future by these young fathers. This focus is suggestive of an emerging shift toward transcendence and generativity, although clearly not fully realized for these young fathers.

Some fathers sought to fulfill their own needs through their children almost, it seemed, to achieve a degree of redemption. Michael, for instance, shared his wish to compensate for not having a father by having a child himself:

> I've always wanted to have a kid, just because I guess I never really had a dad. 'Cause he was – that's quick – an a-hole, we don't get along, (…) so I wanted to try to do stuff with my kids that my dad never did with me.

Particularly those fathers with traumatic experiences during childhood felt that positive experiences with their child could make up for the bad experiences they had with their own parents. The way their child looked up to them was an important part of their identity. They attributed their positive sense of self to the happiness and hope that came from knowing they could give their child something they felt they had not had, as Cormac commented:

> The thing that I enjoy most is looking at him and just knowing that, that's just little me. You know that's a mini of me, of my DNA, (…) just like knowing that he's going to look up to me, knowing that he's going to have his dad around and having good advice and stuff and just knowing that he's gonna have somebody that is always going to love him no matter what, every day.

The task of parenting is complex and entails some capacity of *self-transcendence* (Erikson, 1997; Frankl, 1978, 2000), which means to focus beyond one's individual needs in order to attend to, interpret, and respond sensitively to a child's needs. Frankl emphasized that "the more a human being forgets himself and gives himself, the more human he is" (Frankl, 1978, p. 94). This idea is also related to the concept of generativity, which describes planning and thoughtful care for the next generation (Erikson, 1997). The unselfish and

mature nature of *self-transcendence* and *generativity* usually is part of the life stage of mature adulthood that is a few steps ahead of young fathers, who are in the process of exploring and testing new identities. Aries (2001) described how adolescent parents may be too immature to engage in self-transcendence for their children:

> Adolescent parents are viewed as cognitively and emotionally immature, too egocentric to adequately assume responsibility for the care of another person, to truly understand a baby's emotional and physical needs, and to separate a baby's feelings from their own. Young adolescents may fail to realize how difficult and time consuming a baby can be and are distressed to discover how different an actual baby can be from the one who they fantasized would offer them unconditional love. (p. 515)

Considering self-transcendence and generativity on one hand and immaturity described by Aries (2001) on the other hand, the developmental stage and experience of the young fathers in this study might be situated somewhere "in between" these stages. Young fathers did, in fact, realize and initiate action to respond to the demands of having a baby, but their interview responses did not provide evidence that they had the maturity to focus consistently on their children in a self-transcendent, generative way.

Conclusions and Implications

For the young fathers who participated in this study, the transition to fatherhood marked what they experienced as a turning point in their life,

catalyzing the desire to live up to their responsibilities as a father despite the barriers they faced from their difficult childhood histories and personal involvement in high-risk life-styles. All fathers in this study fully embraced their father role. The transition to fatherhood initiated a shift that involved young fathers' identity development. They described the shift from "pothead" to "regular person" (Michael), from being "a mess" to having "matured a lot" (Craig), or from being a street kid that was "the best guy out there" selling drugs, to "waking up and being a parent" (Devon). For the fathers in this study, fatherhood presented a compelling opportunity to mature and better their lives. These findings are consistent with more recent studies that describe fatherhood as a turning point to a new identity of a responsible father. Devault et al. (2010) for instance, reported on fathers' new identity and the shift toward transcendence and generativity as follows:

> [F]atherhood constitutes a kind of window of opportunity, a springboard to becoming someone (…) Fatherhood is perceived as an opportunity to take one's life back and take care of another one. It appears to be the passage from being self-centered to being centered on the other person. (p. 31)

Within this context, further research is necessary to understand whether for a young man's identity the meaning of fathering a child is similar to what Merrick (1995) described as a "career choice", fostering positive identity development in adolescent mothers. Although the young fathers in this study represent a very vulnerable group who might not be characteristic of the

"average" teen father (since all of them were involved in their children's lives), the findings in this study are consistent with the small body of existing research evidence that young fathers and their families do represent a vulnerable group that might particularly benefit from social support as a protective factor contributing to their resilience (Deslauriers, Devault, Groulx, & Sévigny, 2012; Sieger & Renk, 2007).

It is important, however, to keep in mind that the findings of this study are based on participants who were involved fathers in their children's lives, had fully embraced their father role, were able to financially provide for their children (to some extent), and were comfortable enough to seek help from a support organization. Compared to the research literature that typically characterizes young fathers as disengaged from their children, unable to provide financially, and unlikely to seek out formal support, it is clear that the findings of this study are particularly meaningful for the group of involved young fathers who were successful at turning their lives around. Yet, very little is known about the majority of teen fathers who disengage early, struggle to financially provide, and are unable to seek or find formal support. Because of this gap in research, further studies about the "silent" majority of disengaged fathers are needed. What are the experiences of disengaged fathers compared to those who are involved? What influences their decision to become involved? How can we reach those fathers, and what kind of formal support do they need to remain involved in their children's lives? These are merely a few examples of questions that are currently unanswered in the research literature. While we know little

about how disengaged fathers experience their fatherhood, it can be assumed that it is a crucial developmental stage of turmoil and confusion in which formal support would be particularly helpful. Timely and targeted support not only can assist fathers to develop positive identities as fathers, it can also act as a buffer for social adversities, affecting their children and their children's mothers. Thus, appropriate intervention is necessary to interrupt the intergenerational transmission of teen parenthood and its related risks and harmful consequences.

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PAPER 3: FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMING FOR YOUNG FATHERS

There is considerable evidence in the research literature that father involvement has benefits for children's outcomes (Dubowitz et al., 2001; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2007), mothers' well being (Dunn, 2004) and fathers' social and emotional development (Palkovitz, 2002; Settersten & Cancel-Tirado, 2010). Unfortunately, current demographic trends show that an increasing number of fathers are completely absent from their children's lives (Livingston & Parker, 2011). Teen fathers seem to particularly struggle to remain involved in their children's lives (Scott, Steward-Streng, Manlove & Moore, 2012). Although research suggests that the majority of teen fathers want to be involved in child rearing (Shannon & Abrams, 2007), less than half of them are involved at the time of their child's birth and only a small percentage of them remain in contact with their children over time (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Rhein et al., 1997). Although it has been identified that young fathers "need a great deal of help in order to become supportive parents or partners" (Jaffee et al., 2001, p. 812), formal support and services for young fathers remain scarce (Devault, Gaudet, Bolte, & St-Denis, 2005; Rozie-Battle, 2003).

Much research has been conducted on teen mothers and their children. Government and non-profit agencies in North America have developed a variety of programs and services for teen mothers to assist them in making the transition to the parenting role and to support them in providing emotionally and

financially for their child(ren). In spite of the growing body of knowledge on the importance of father involvement for children's, mothers', and fathers' well being, the development of policies and programs to promote father involvement—especially teen father involvement—has lagged behind (Glikman, 2004; Dudley, 2007). Reasons for the current lack of implementation of services and programming for young fathers include societal attitudes towards fathers that expect men to be self-sufficient and able to provide for their family (Addis & Mahalik, 2003), uncertainty about young fathers' circumstances and needs (Lane & Clay, 2000; Scott, Steward-Streng, Manlove, & Moore, 2012), and insecure and limited funding to support young fathers (Devault et al., 2005). In addition, attempts by agencies to offer services to fathers often have not been successful despite their efforts to reach out to and support young fathers (Weinman, Smith & Buzi, 2002). Lane and Clay (2000) have argued that such efforts are often based on false assumptions that the programs offered are addressing fathers' needs, and that fathers will enroll in programs and use services provided. In reality, however, fathers are hesitant to actively seek help or support (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Devault et al., 2005), report considerably smaller benefits of intervention programs than mothers (Fletcher, Freeman, & Matthey, 2011), and programs often do not meet fathers' needs (Weinman et al., 2002; Wilkes, Mannix, & Jackson, 2011). One reason for the failure to recruit and maintain fathers, especially young fathers, in programs and services may be the common top-down approach, that is researchers reviewing literature on formal support instead of analyzing perspectives from providers and recipients of support, used

to identify fathers' needs and to determine the service delivery characteristics important to provide meaningful support for young fathers (see Weinman et al. for an example of the top-down approach).

While many social service agencies either fail to, or struggle to, provide appropriate services to young fathers (Dudley, 2007; Smillie, 2004), some agencies seem to be more successful. One example in Western Canada is *Terra – Centre for pregnant and parenting teens. Terra,* a non-profit organization has offered its services to teenagers since 1971. Although the agency initially served pregnant and parenting teen mothers exclusively, in 1999 it extended its services to teen fathers. *Terra's* services include home visitation, individual counseling, crisis intervention, parenting education, subsidized housing and legal advocacy. Despite numerous barriers (such as insufficient financial funding, attached social stigma, and lack of awareness in the community), *Terra* can be seen as atypical in that it has been able to sustain and expand their program for young fathers (R. Wells, Coordinator at *Terra*, personal communication, November 5, 2012). The purpose of the current study was to explore factors that contributed to an agency's success in offering services for young fathers from the perspective of receivers and providers of services.

Background

Since adolescence is a time of significant developmental change and turmoil, it is seen as an untimely and premature stage to become a parent (Aries, 2001). With the transition to fatherhood, teen fathers enter parenthood and adapt to a new set of responsibilities that the father role entails such as providing for a

new family (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). This change of role to an adolescent parent is a major challenge that creates a sense of ambiguity between being a parent and needing to be parented. Teenagers are usually financially dependent, in the middle of developmental transitions, and psychologically often not ready to take responsibility for a family (Aries, 2001; Thornberry, Smith, & Howard, 1997).

Family support and access to information, as well as new and meaningful relationships are necessary to accept and create a new identity as a parent. Although the parenting experiences and life situations of teen fathers have received little attention (Glikman, 2004), research suggests that teen fathers want to be significantly involved in child rearing (Rhein et al., 1997; Shannon & Abrams, 2007). At the same time, teen fathers struggle to "provide emotional and financial support for their children" (Thornberry et al., 1997, p. 520). However, teen fatherhood also has been found to be strongly related to involvement in risk behavior such as drug use, criminal activities, and precocious sexual activity (Shannon & Abrams, 2007; Slesnick, et al., 2006; Thornberry et al., 1997). Furthermore, young fathers are more likely to be homeless than their non-parenting peers (Slesnick et al., 2006), often face economic and educational deprivation (Mollborn, 2007), are more likely to be in unstable relationships with their partners (Thornberry et al., 1997), and lack knowledge about child rearing (Rhein et al., 1997). Additionally, teen fathers' involvement may be compromised by maternal gatekeeping (McBride et al., 2005): Teen fathers need

to negotiate the terms with their child's mother as well as gain the approval of their child's maternal grandparents to remain involved (Gee & Rhodes, 2003).

The need to provide and increase support for teen fathers has been identified in research and practice (Dudley, 2007; Glikman, 2004; Rhein et al., 1997; Thornberry et al., 1997). Yet, how to effectively meet teen fathers' needs and to support them continues to be a challenge for service providing agencies (Deslauriers, Devault, Groulx, Sevigny, 2012; Smillie, 2004).

Arguably, since most formal social support services focus on women's and children's needs, male experiences and men's hesitation to reach out for help into consideration are often not taken into account (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Persistent cultural, social and political ideologies and norms about men discourage them from seeking the services they might need. Addis and Mahalik (2003) identified " a mismatch between available service and traditional masculine roles emphasizing self-reliance, emotional control, and power" (p. 12).

Thus, the undertaking to support young fathers and effectively meet their needs seems to be a threefold challenge. First, adolescent fathers, who are typically between the ages of 13 and 19, are in the midst of developmental transitions and psychological exploration and thus lack cognitive and emotional maturity to care for a baby (Aries, 2001). Second, teen fatherhood is strongly related to a range of cumulating risk factors and poor adult outcomes for fathers and their children including homelessness, financial and educational deprivation, and delinquency (Sigle-Rushton, 2005). Lastly, formal support is scarce for teen

fathers (Dudley, 2007), and less accessible for men than for women (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Dudley (2007) sums up the status quo of research concerning teen fathers as follows: "The literature is still very limited about who they are, what they need, and how we can help them" (p. 171).

Although providing formal support for teen fathers has been found to be challenging for various reasons, it appears that *Terra* provides support that meets young fathers' needs. In the early 2000's, the agency tripled their case load of young fathers and have sustained this level since then (K. Caine, Senior Manager at *Terra Centre*, personal communication, November, 2008). What makes *Terra* so successful in connecting with and supporting young fathers? The purpose of the study reported here was to identify key factors to *Terra's* success in providing formal support and services that are helpful and meaningful for young fathers. Using a bottom-up approach (i.e., perspectives from providers and recipients of support) instead of a top-down approach (i.e., perspectives from researchers reviewing literature on formal support) facilitates the identification of young fathers' needs and successful service delivery by incorporating the experiences of service providers and the voices of young fathers.

Methods

This study employed interpretive description as a method to explore factors that accounted for an agency's success in providing services to young fathers. Interpretive description, rooted in the nursing discipline, is a method that aims to generate knowledge in a clinical or applied practice setting (Thorne, 2008). With its goal of "coherent conceptual description" (Thorne, Reimer

Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004, p. 7) grounded in practice, it is a useful method to identify themes associated with a specific question or context (Thorne, 2008). Since interpretive description builds on and incorporates existing knowledge of a topic within the analysis, requires a relatively small sample, and aims to be practice relevant, it was determined to be an appropriate method of gaining a greater understanding of which features were successful in providing meaningful support for young fathers.

Participants

Five staff members (executive director, senior manager, program coordinator, and two social workers) and four current clients who became fathers between 15 and 19 years of age participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. At the time of the interview, fathers were 18 to 26 years old and each had one child aged between 2 and 7 years old. Two were single fathers with sole custody, and two did not have custody but had court legislated access— they saw their child once or twice a week and every second weekend. None were in a relationship with the child's mother. All had experienced significant life problems such as criminal activities, homelessness, or drug addiction before taking on the responsibility of being an involved father.

Procedures

To explore the factors related to successful provision of services to teen fathers from the perspectives of agency staff and of teen fathers, semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with staff and clients were conducted. Interview guides were developed in collaboration with *Terra* staff around the main

research question: “What are the factors that contribute to success in providing services for teen fathers”? The guiding questions for *Terra* staff were: Is the *Young Dads Program* successful? And if so, how? Which areas are less successful, and why? Additional questions or probes addressed the process of program development, challenges encountered, and differences and similarities with the teen mothers’ program. The last question asked participants about how they envisioned services for teen fathers in the future. The interview guide for fathers included questions about their personal background, how and when they became connected with *Terra*, how they would describe *Terra* as an agency, and what kind of support or programs they received or wanted. Most interviews took 40 to 45 minutes. Interviews with staff took place at *Terra,* and interviews with fathers were in their homes.

Constant comparison was employed to analyze and interpret the data. Constant comparison describes a technique that compares parts of the data (codes) with the whole data set to conceptualize themes and relationships between themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Thorne, 2008). Interviews were initially reviewed and coded related to factors that were successful in providing support for young fathers and then sorted into thematic categories. For instance, the codes “belief in fathers” and “father friendly environment” were included in the theme “valuing and welcoming fathers”. To ensure rigor, the authors verified the fit between research question and research method, engaged in theorizing and critical thinking, and refined themes through team discussion (Morse et al., 2002).

Findings

Three main themes emerged from the data as important agency and programming characteristics for successfully engaging and supporting young fathers: Valuing and welcoming fathers; adopting a male perspective; and, providing a safe haven and secure base. Although the themes are somewhat interrelated, they represent stages of development in agency programming where each theme builds on the foundation of the former theme.

Valuing and Welcoming Fathers.

A dominant theme was the importance of explicitly valuing and welcoming young fathers as demonstrated by agency staff members. This involved the agency members' belief in fathers and fathering and the way this belief was implemented through organizational changes and actively reaching out to create a father friendly environment, as described by one agency staff member:

> [W]here we're successful is really seeing the potential in the fathers. I think there's a very, very strong belief in the value of fathering and [how it] contribute[s] to the rest of outcomes for children. And it's taken, you know, a number of years but I think we really do have a committed staff, team, and agency behind this work.

This belief in fathers and fathering takes the child's best interest into account as agency staff members believe in positive outcomes for children when fathers are involved. One staff participant reflected: "I think we truly understood

and embraced that belief that for the child, we need to help the dads become involved".

Organizational changes. *Terra* staff members' belief in young fathers and their potential was evident in significant changes that the organization initiated in 2003 in order to explicitly include, reach, and support young fathers. To be more welcoming of young fathers, *Terra* staff members revised the mission statement, developed a new gender-neutral logo, made on-site changes including prominent display of pictures and posters of young fathers and their children, and consciously adopted male inclusive language in their practice to make the agency a more father friendly place. "We re-did the mission (…) to be inclusive of dads" (Staff participant). The former feminine logo of a mother figure holding a baby (in burgundy tones) was replaced by a more gender-neutral (orange-green), abstract logo. A staff member explained:

> [S]o our logo changed (…) The logo is very much of new growth and it symbolizes a seedling, but it has two leaves, and in those two leaves there's a mom and a dad [as] a symbol [in] the holistic circle (…). But when we did that, it very much was taking into consideration that we do services for young dads and how do we holistically approach the whole vision of moms and dads.

Staff members identified readiness for change as a pivotal factor for an agency that aims to support fathers. A willingness on the part of agency staff to engage in critical evaluation of the status quo was described as a key starting point for attempting to improve services for fathers. A staff member explained:

> There has to be a readiness for change for the organization to recognize fathers. Period. And [to] look at ways to say okay, I recognize fathers, how are we supporting them? Are we not supporting them at all? (…) People [blame lack of] funding all the time but reality is they have to look at their organization. Period."

Actively reaching out. Based on the understanding that it is potentially more difficult for a young father to access services or ask for support than for a young mother, *Terra* staff members reported making active efforts to connect with young fathers by reaching out to them instead of waiting for young fathers to come in. One staff member described the need to recognize the fallacy of assuming that if young fathers are not asking for help, they must not need any.

> Developmentally they're young people. And they live so much in the moment, and yes we can say, well, if they don't make the first effort, you know, if they're not going to call us, that means they don't really want services… I think we still have a little bit more work to do there to really, you know, provide that outreach.

One way agency members actively reach out to young fathers is by asking young mothers when they call in for services whether their (ex) partners might be interested in receiving information about the *Young Dads Program*. *Terra* staff members use the opportunity to inform mothers about the *Young Dads Program* and the possibility for their (ex-) partners to be involved and to receive support. They also approach fathers who are present during home

visitations with mothers. One father who was actively approached answered the question of how he got in contact with *Terra* as follows:

> I didn't know anything about *Terra*. Actually, one of the workers from *Terra* – my girlfriend was involved with them – came up to *me* and I figured it would be a good idea to have some support and *Terra* was offering [it].

An important part of reaching out to young fathers and involving them in programs is making sure the first experience with the agency is a positive one. Existing gendered ideals in Western society of strong, independent and providing males make it more difficult for young fathers to seek out support and services than for young mothers (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Staff members acknowledged this barrier, and put extra effort into making the agency inviting and accessible to young men:

> When a guy walks into this building and he's asking for support, that's huge. It's scary, it's terrifying, and if he came in and met a whole bunch of women that were not male friendly, that were not inviting (…) he would not be here, he would not stay, he would not ask for help. And asking for help is huge for any man to do. … But [for] our young men it's even harder.

Agency staff members created a father friendly environment by having an open-door policy and by making sure that young fathers are greeted in the same welcoming way that mothers are:

> [T]hey always know that *Terra's* doors are open and that we never judge what situations they're in, but we're always willing and wanting to support them in whatever they're facing. So I truly believe that it's always been that open door policy that we have here and also the fact that the organization really strives on being father friendly. [H]aving that environment makes it much more comfortable for a young father to walk in here and share his stories without feeling judged or without feeling persecuted.

The reported positive impression that *Terra* has been trying to make was confirmed in the interviews with all participating fathers who described their contacts with the agency as very positive. One father reflected on his first visit:

> There's no worries once you walk in their door. I know the first day I was going there, I was very worried on how they were going to look at me and if they were going to judge me, or what not. There was no judgments or worries after I talked to them, and they were just like, we want to help you and it was very, very nice and smooth and easy.

Adopting a Male Perspective

Terra's decades of expertise and experience with providing services for young mothers was not as helpful as would be expected in developing a similarly successful program for young fathers. The process of establishing and refining the *Young Dads Program* was described as 'trial and error', in which agency staff members tried to apply some of the concepts and contents of its young

mothers' programs to young fathers. This attempt was described by one of the staff participants:

> Well, one of the biggest challenges was I think just laying aside our assumptions. (…) What we were doing with our moms was not going to work with our dads. Our dads did not want to come to group programming on life skills. Even though we felt that perhaps that was a good thing for them. They didn't want to sit around and have coffee and be relational. So some of the things that we *thought* were going to work in the beginning really bombed.

After trying to adapt an existing, female oriented program to a male clientele, *Terra* staff members engaged in a process of learning how to adopt a male perspective in order to be successful in supporting young dads. Adopting a male perspective meant change for the agency on two levels: The first change was to integrate a focus on doing. This entailed short-term drop in services to make it easy for fathers to get support when needed, as well as long-term services that involved more detailed planning and working on their future. The focus on doing was developed as a counterpart to the focus on the relational conversations that worked well with a female clientele. The second change involved adapting services to the needs of young males, which was a larger endeavor and entailed input from the perspective of male staff members, greater flexibility of services, and a sensitivity to systemic and attitudinal barriers specific to the reality of young fathers.

A focus on doing. One of the agency members' learning experiences involved observing that their male clientele lived more "in the moment" than their young mothers: "One of our learnings is that young men connect in the moment. So when they're in a crisis, when they need it, that's when they need to connect. They can't be on waiting lists for a long time." Staff members realized that helping meet fathers' immediate and concrete needs, such as providing food or a bus ticket, often facilitated and established a first connection:

> What we learned is if we can connect with them the first time they identify a need, so they don't have food and they call us and we can help them get food. Or they need a bus ticket to go to a job interview. If we can [make] that immediate connection, which is our real focus at the front end, they come back.

Young fathers differed from mothers in that they approached staff with more tangible needs, such as bus tickets, food, clothes, a reference letter, legal support, etc. In contrast, mothers were usually more comfortable having longer conversations at the beginning of their intake. Although all of the young fathers in this study eventually developed close relationships with their social workers and shared their hopes and fears with them, staff members identified a focus on doing as an important stepping stone in first connecting with young fathers, before some of the talking could take place. One social worker explains the process as:

> [W]hat it means is, you speak less, you do more (…). They like you to say 'we're going to do this, we're going to do the action plan'. It

> [can] take us a year and we do it and it's done and then we talk a bit.

The focus on doing seems to be a better starting point for working with young fathers than the typical long intake interview that works with young mothers. Furthermore, the focus on doing offers the possibility for immediate gratification and allows social workers to focus on clients' strengths, which in turn is beneficial for developing and exploring short-and long-term goals. One social worker saw creating goals as a useful opportunity for young fathers to develop "a vision". The focus on doing also refers to a variety of services that were offered to young fathers. The interviewed fathers described a variety of barriers to being involved and providing fathers, such as unemployment, shortage of money or food, unresolved relationship issues, and sometimes conflicts with the law. From their perspective, the agency was a good source of support because the agency was able to help them with a variety of issues.

> I also had very big problems with anger and everything. And (…) through *Terra*, I've actually been able to work on it more and become more calmer of a person. So they've helped me out a whole bunch because when I first started with *Terra*, I could barely read or write. And so they helped me with finding programs for pretty much everything I needed. It was awesome.

Adapting services. The agency sees the involvement with young fathers as a work in progress that they try to constantly improve. One of the social workers explained that:

> We're continually changing, both to meet the needs of our clients and both to meet the needs of the changes in the city and of the province. So we are constantly adapting and re-modifying our program.

Adapting services describes the agency's various ways of altering services according to the needs of their male clients. It involves considerable flexibility in the process of working with young fathers, sensitivity to systemic and attitudinal barriers, and hiring male outreach workers.

It was relatively easy to reach teen mothers, since they often stayed home with their babies or attended the school associated with the agency. The school is a frequent meeting point for mothers and outreach workers. However, it was more difficult for staff to connect and work with young fathers. Staff members recognized that flexibility plays a larger role in staying connected with men than with women, and that flexible times were important to give male clients the opportunity to 'drop in' or 'drop out' when needed. One staff participant reflected on the necessity of being more flexible when working with fathers compared to mothers:

> I think we've been more adaptable and flexible than our moms' programming. Because, you know, we could have a young dad that just kind of walks in today and we have more that drop-in kind of approach with him where that's not usually what we're doing with the young moms. But it seems that [it] works for them as an initial starting point to reach out, check us out a little bit, see how we're

> going to react to them, and then it starts to open up the door for them a little bit more, which is quite a different process than we use for the moms.

One young father commented on how he appreciated this flexibility: "We give them a call (…) and they actually wait around for us. They work around us. Not us around them." Since agency members attempt to meet teen fathers' multiple needs, the program has had to become flexible and tailored to the individual needs of their male clients. Moreover, agency staff members are constantly re-evaluating and adjusting this program. Essentially, their staff is very creative in helping young men in whatever way they can. A client thinks back: "[T]hey were very open to new ideas. They asked me what sort of things [were] going on in my life and what they could do to help me with them".

Another important aspect of *Terra's* success is their awareness of the systemic and attitudinal barriers that young men face, as well as their efforts to overcome these. The greatest barrier identified was the lack of funding for young fathers. Since a significant portion of the agency's funding comes from government and is tied to offering specific programs, agency staff described several examples of how fathers were excluded from participating in programs or from services for which mothers were funded. Not only were fathers not eligible for free formula available to mothers (even if the father had sole custody), but they were excluded from programs, such as life skills, programs that staff felt would be beneficial for them. Despite the agency's efforts to include young fathers, government policy around funding often did not support the fathers. For

example, in describing what the agency thought would be a beneficial program for young fathers focusing on life skills, one staff member explained:

> It looked great on paper and we had a really good facilitator [but] we [only] had one or two dads attend because most dads couldn't get funding to attend (…) Alberta Works will support a mom to attend a program like that, it wouldn't support a guy to attend a program like that. So they couldn't come.

A less obvious barrier for young fathers was accessing the food bank. One of the male outreach workers picked up on young fathers' hesitation to go to the Food Bank and so he eliminated this obstacle by going to the Food Bank for them: "[The] Food Bank is the last thing that they want to do. So (…) I used to go (…) to pick up the food [and] dropped it off at their house". Although the Food Bank initially disapproved, he persisted until they allowed him to pick up the food in lieu of the young fathers. This kind of understanding of young men's difficulties in accessing services is just one example that underlines the benefits of having skilled, male outreach workers as staff. There is broad consensus within the agency that having skilled, male social workers plays an essential role in successfully reaching out to and connecting with young fathers. A staff member said the following about one of the social workers: "He came in (…) with a lot of wisdom, with a lot of experience". Male outreach workers brought experience and adequate training to the work with young fathers and a willingness to advance their skills and personal development. One social worker mentioned: "I'm constantly in workshops and seminars to help improve my

skills and my toolbox (…) to help me working with the clientele I work with now". It also became obvious that it was easier for male clients to confide in another male, who was close in age and hence understood some of the life stages and current trends. The male social workers were also seen as positive role models for the young fathers:

> A lot of our young dads (…) have never experienced a positive role model in their life. Some of them have grown up in the [Child Protection] system; some have just never had a father figure. So how do you become a father when you've never experienced that? And so, I think, one of the big successes [is] that we hire *men* to work with our young dads. Because that connection is different. (…) They build trust, they build a relationship, they can have those hard conversations and they can have role modeling. That's huge.

Although *Terra* started their services for young fathers with female service providers the opportunity to have male outreach workers was one of the keys to connecting more effectively with young fathers.

Providing a Safe Haven and a Secure Base

Perhaps the most surprising finding in this study was the evident importance for the agency to provide a "safe haven" and a "secure base" for young fathers. At first glance, these concepts seem to contradict the key element focus on doing, which described that young fathers – in contrast to mothers – needed more action orientated services instead of relational conversations. However, the focus on doing seems to be of particular importance in the

beginning of the relationship, when young fathers were testing the waters, but had not yet developed a trusting relationship with the social worker. Furthermore, while young fathers seemed to be less comfortable in group settings than young mothers, they connected well in one-on-one situations. For instance, one young father, who reported not particularly liking some of the group activities at *Terra* and feeling awkward playing on the floor with his daughter in front of other people, stated:

> I feel more comfortable with my worker than I do with pretty much anyone else. It's somewhere I just open up and say what's on my mind and try to figure some things out. Which I have done a few times. So that's just – you need that person to talk to when things aren't going the way you'd like them to or just – someone there for you, honestly.

The concepts "safe haven" and "secure base" are key elements of parent-child attachment and describe, "how the parent serves as a secure base from which the child can explore and as a safe haven to which the child can return in times of trouble" (Hoffman et al., 2006, p. 1018). In this case, *Terra's* social workers provided emotional safety and did not let their clients down when they got into trouble. Furthermore, they allowed their clients to explore some of their struggles and issues and to re-frame their situations from a secure base.

Safe haven. *Terra's* clients perceived the agency as a safe haven they could return to when needed. Both clients and staff emphasized the significance for young fathers to feel emotionally safe and accepted in the agency. It seems

that fathers were able to connect well with staff and that they felt safe at *Terra*. The following quote illustrates the finding that safety for these young men is also related to not wanting to be seen by others in a service providing environment. One client expressed his gratitude as follows: "That they're willing to help, "it's okay. We understand". So it's kind of just like I said, a good thing. And you're always behind closed doors and no one really gets to see you, so – it's a safe spot."

The idea of an agency as a safe place was something that its staff actively pursued in their endeavor to create a male friendly environment for young fathers. One staff explained:

> [T]hey would look at that and say 'this is a safe place to be'. And they come back again, and again, and again, and even ones who've been away from *Terra* for years when their life sort of goes into a struggle, you know, *Terra's* that safe place to come back to and that there's people here who care.

In order to be that "safe haven" and "secure base" for clients, agency members made the quality of nurturing one of its core values. One staff member commented on this by saying: "We're all nurturers. And getting young men to understand that that's a positive word and that it's okay that they can be nurturing fathers". One of the social workers in particular practiced being nurturing in the sense of a "safe haven" and "secure base" for his clients. The senior manager described him as follows:

> He really focused on their strengths and he was, for lack of a better word, nurturing them (…). So these young dads probably have never been nurtured, they've never been parented well. And so he connected to them (…), so he in essence was parenting the parent. From a professional perspective, but that's what he provided them, that emotional state.

A father confirmed this in his remark that "[they are] making me feel like a part of a community or a small family that is always there for you. No matter what".

Secure base. Beyond the feeling of safety, the fathers who participated in this study also talked about how emotionally close they felt to staff members working at *Terra.* These four young fathers expressed the emotional security they felt when talking to staff: "Yeah, there [were] things that I couldn't talk to anyone else about. And I could talk to [the social worker] about them". Young fathers seemed to feel safe enough with their social workers to explore issues or life choices that were problematic or unpleasant to them. Several fathers indicated that conversations with their social worker helped them to "re-think" some of their life situations and to look at things from a different perspective. For instance, one of the teen fathers said: "We would sell drugs. And beat up people (…) It didn't work (…) *Terra* helped me realize that's not the life I wanted; for me or my son". Another young father stated: "Mental support was the biggest thing. Like – I was just really unsure about, like what the most

important things in my life had to be. And [social worker] was really good about that."

The way that young fathers valued and trusted their social worker is particularly noteworthy when considering that all four participating fathers reported unfavorable experiences with former social workers outside of *Terra* (i.e., assigned by court or child welfare). One young father commented on the social worker that was assigned by court:

> In the end we got stuck with the social worker. Which actually did help out a little. Not very much in my eyes, just more of a pain in the ass than anything. (…) No support there. Just more 'get the stuff done so we can say you're able to take care of your kid and then we'll leave you alone' is pretty much [what] that was.

While this participant felt that the assigned social workers simply did not care enough, other fathers reported experiences with social workers assigned by court or child welfare that had considerable negative consequences for them. For example, one father, who was not allowed to see his daughter who had been apprehended by child welfare because of his partner's drug abuse, shared his experiences:

> *Terra* was very, very friendly towards me. I feel like society and the government is kind of prejudiced against us, though. You know, it's just – just because of the way things are set up. Especially in, like, in my situation going to court and fighting for custody of my kid, was a very difficult situation. [Although] the mother had such

> serious drug problems at the time and it was obvious. I remember the first social worker my daughter had. And she was *very* prejudiced towards me (…). She did not want to let me see my daughter. You know? And like, her mom was a junkie. And she was getting to see her daughter three times a week. And I wasn't allowed to?! And I have a job, I have an apartment, I've got food in my fridge.

This last quote illustrates how powerful the relationship between young men and their workers can be in influencing a young father's self-understanding, self-esteem, and role in society. One of the fathers, when asked about what was more helpful to him, the material support (e.g., food hamper) or the worker, answered: "Yeah, it's the worker. It's not the material, it's more just the worker. And just having that person there. To always help out." The promise of "just having that person there" in a nurturing way was one of the pivotal keys for the agency to support young fathers in an effective and sustainable way.

Discussion

This study explored the perspectives of providers and recipients of services to better understand which factors are important when attempting to reach young fathers, connect with them, and provide the support they need. The findings of this study are significant in that they show that even young, high-risk fathers, who bring a variety of problems with them, can strongly benefit from agency services in numerous ways. Moreover, the findings are useful to gain a better understanding of the ways in which agencies, programs and staff can offer

appropriate and meaningful services for young fathers and consequently learn a bit more about "who they are, what they need, and how we can help them" (Dudley, 2007, p. 171).

The findings suggest that a father friendly agency that values and welcomes fathers and integrates a male perspective by adding other male components (such as increased flexibility or a focus on doing) to their programs are key factors for successful support of young fathers. These findings are consistent with recent research that suggests that fathers may feel excluded from services, be reluctant to seek formal support, and benefit most from support that is based on their needs (Deslauriers et al., 2012; Ross, Church, Hill, Seaman, & Roberts, 2012). The finding that a focus on doing was important for fathers also aligns with research that recommends hands-on experiences instead of abstract parenting knowledge (Barr, Brito, Zocca, Reina, Rodriguez & Shauffer, 2011; Deslauriers et al., 2012).

The most surprising finding was the agency's focus on the formation of nurturing and trusting relationships between staff members and young fathers. Although research has reported that fathers are hesitant to talk about or show their emotions (Anderson, Kohler & Letiecq, 2002), more recent research suggests that it may not be that they do not want to share their emotions, but rather that they are afraid to do so (Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland & Tolman, 2012). Fear seems to be a key factor that interferes with the ability to build trusting relationships with service providers that makes it safe to share emotions and needs. These trusting relationships with service providers are

essential for young fathers who need to be nurtured, supported, and parented themselves in order to be competent parents to their own child(ren). Fathers' apprehension to engage in formal programs and services is underexplored and further research is needed to expand understanding about how to make fathers to be more comfortable and how to facilitate the process to make services and programs more meaningful and attractive to young fathers.

Despite societal and financial barriers, *Terra* went through a learning process in figuring out how to best meet young fathers' needs and continues to actively explore how to better meet the needs of young fathers (R. Wells, Coordinator at *Terra Centre*, personal communication, November 5, 2012). Their experience and successful engagement with young fathers can offer an important contribution to address the complex phenomenon of supporting young fathers and their children. The findings of this study illuminate a variety of critical factors in delivering services for young fathers. The insights gained will be useful for other service providing agencies in evaluating their own factors and strategies. Moreover, some of *Terra's* approaches may aid other agencies in implementing or improving support programs for fathers in general. In both cases, this could lead to more effective support strategies decreasing costs for agencies and society, and may contribute positively to (young) fathers' and their children's lives. While conducting this study, it also became obvious that the greater Edmonton area is in need of appropriate services for young fathers, since currently the *Young Dads' Program* is the only program in this region and cannot accommodate the needs of all young fathers.

One of the main factors contributing to the striking lack of such services is the continuing prevalence of societal barriers and prejudices against young fathers. It is time to realize that young fathers do not exist in isolation but must be considered in the context of their new family, including a young mother and their common child. To effectively support young families it is necessary that funders and service providers recognize, accept and support young fathers through programming.

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CONCLUDING CHAPTER: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to contribute to the small body of research on teen fatherhood and to bridge the gap between research on teen fatherhood and the development and implementation of support programs for young fathers.

The three papers identify and discuss three different aspects of teen fatherhood that are important in order to address the disparity between existing research and inadequate formal support. This concluding chapter synthesizes the key findings of each paper, highlights how each contributes to the existing body of knowledge, and delineates implications for theory and practice.

Paper 1

The purpose of the first paper was to encourage discussion of alternative data collection strategies to engage young fathers in research. The paper suggests that interviewing may not be the ideal data collection strategy with young fathers who are generally less likely to share their personal perspectives (Schwalbe & Woldomir, 2002), and that researchers need to develop alternative, more appropriate data collection strategies for this population. Young fathers' hesitance to participate in research also raises the question whether interviewing may be more suitable for participants who are "highly competent communicators" (Knapik, 2006, p. 11); a description unlikely to include male, vulnerable adolescents. Photo-interviewing is examined as a data collection strategy that may be more comfortable and empowering for young fathers and that adds an interesting visual layer to the data; however, it is dependent upon

being able to engage young fathers in research in general. Despite efforts from the researcher and the staff of the support organization *Terra* to recruit both involved and disengaged fathers, only involved fathers agreed to participate in this research study. The two fathers who disengaged from their partner and children during the study also disengaged from the research study and the support-providing agency. The problem of young fathers "disappearing" from the research process is also reflected in the attrition challenges that Wilkes and her colleagues described: "it was not possible to maintain on-going contact with these young men" (2011, p. 181). Thus, only involved teen fathers were included in the study, while disengaged teen fathers were unfortunately but not intentionally excluded. If certain participants (e.g., disengaged fathers) are unwilling to participate and their perspectives and experiences remain unknown, sampling issues arise that jeopardize the quality of a research study.

The lack of disengaged fathers participating in the study may be an indicator of the persistent social stigma of teen fatherhood and of the prevalent societal expectations of fathers to financially provide for their family, even as teenagers. In a culture with strongly gendered ideals that ascribes the provider role to fathers (Christianssen & Palkovitz, 2001; Townsend, 2002), it seems unlikely for young fathers who are unable to meet this ideal to be comfortable or willing to share their perspective in a research study. Further, recent research suggests that public and academic discourses rigidly dichotomize fathers into "good" and "bad" fathers. This brings about the exclusion of fathers from research and services, which in turn leads to increased uncertainty and hesitance

about how to approach fathers who are not part of the "good" category (Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012). Since young fathers often have limited resources to provide emotional and financial security to mother and child, they typically struggle to make it into the "good" category. From this perspective, "teen fathers are charged with negotiating the stigma associated with having a child off-time and out of wedlock; (…) trying to reestablish their reputations as (…) 'good guys'" (Weber, 2012, p. 917).

Consequently, the failure to include disengaged fathers in the research process is the main limitation of this study and may be one of the main reasons why knowledge around the disengagement process of teen fathers remains sparse. To learn more about disengaged teen fathers, researchers need to design or adapt appropriate strategies to recruit and engage young fathers in research. Moreover, since it can be assumed that disengaged fathers need even more formal support, services, and programming than involved fathers, their perspective is indispensable to exploring trajectories to involvement/disengagement and to learning more about how to support them effectively. Thus, future research on young fathers' disengagement is necessary in order to reach and support those fathers who most need the support. What needs to be addressed further is the issue that certain populations remain underrepresented in research (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010). New ways of engaging these underrepresented populations more successfully need to be developed, since relying on community outreach may not be sufficient to increase engagement of these populations (UyBico, Pavel, & Gross, 2007).

Finally, data collection strategies and typical recruitment strategies that have served well with most mainstream populations may have limited success with populations who are less verbal, vulnerable, or less willing to engage in research. They will need to be adapted and more innovative approaches introduced, to increase participation and engagement of young fathers and other difficult-to-engage populations.

Paper 2

The purpose of the second paper was to examine young fathers' perspectives about their experiences of being an involved father. The findings of this paper suggest that the transition to fatherhood is a window of opportunity for fathers to turn their lives around, despite past and present adversities. Moreover, the purpose and meaning of fathering a child was found to be central and fundamental to the young fathers' identities in this study. This paper contributes to the small, emerging body of knowledge that conceptualizes fatherhood as potentially beneficial to young fathers, as study findings are consistent with current research on positive aspects resulting from young fatherhood, such as maturity through increased responsibility (e.g., Devault, Deslauriers, Groulx, & Sévigny, 2010; Tuffin, Rouch, & Frewin, 2010) and social integration (Negura & Deslauriers, 2010). At the same time, these findings stand in contrast to public and academic discourse that portrays teen fathers as "predators, absent, or uncaring" (Weber, 2012, p. 918) and teen fatherhood as an "unplanned and undesirable event" (Dubeau, 2002, p. 20) or "as a sign of failure or dysfunction" (Schultz, 2008, p. 114). Despite the more recent trend of teen fatherhood

research to focus on a strengths-based perspective contesting the existing discourse of "dead beat dads", another (albeit smaller) stream of research continues to reinforce the existing stereotype of the careless and irresponsible teen father. Weber (2012), for instance, describes teen fathers' negotiations of identity and felt stigma as denying all responsibilities for the pregnancy and as identifying themselves with questionable male attributes such as being "'naturally' heterosexually obsessed" (p. 905) and "incapable of controlling their sexuality" (p. 911). Weber (2012) raises the issue of how these male norms on one hand confirm men's masculinity, but on the other hand add to the stigma of young fatherhood: "[T]hese same images also serve to stigmatize teen fathers as selfish, and even predatory. While these approaches may allow teen fathers to claim masculine identities, they also stigmatize them as the wrong kind of men" (p. 918). The conceptualization of teen fathers as "responsible in meeting the demands of fatherhood" (Tuffin et al., 2010, p. 493), as opposed to "teen fathers as selfish, even predatory" (Weber, 2012, p. 900) is a good example of the existing artificial and rigid dichotomy of the "good" versus "bad" father discourse in research and practice (Maxwell et al., 2012).

Although the findings of this paper lean toward the "good" father perspective, by describing fathers who experience themselves as responsible and mature, this study also identified the difficulty of young fathers to orient themselves towards others (their children) due to their level of maturity and tendencies to compensate their own needs through their children. Another complexity that this study adds to the research on teen fatherhood is the finding

that none of the participants regretted becoming a father in adolescence, and several explicitly stated that they wanted and planned to have a family. This offers an alternative way of thinking about teen parenthood that diverges from other popular explanations of the occurrence of teen pregnancy. For instance, two popular explanations for teen pregnancy are a lack of appropriate sex education and the constant exposure to sexuality in the media which are believed to contribute to sexual permissiveness and unprotected sex among adolescents. Mark Kiselica, who is one of the key researchers focusing on adolescent fatherhood, suggests:

> Too many American youth are still becoming pregnant and having children during their teenage years because our society is sexually permissive, fails to adequately prepare our nation's children for sex, and leaves them with a fragile foundation upon which they are expected to build their lives. American boys and girls are bombarded with sexual images in the television shows and movies they watch, the songs they hear, and the books and magazines they read. (2008, p. 4)

Although the appropriateness of exposure to sexualized images is questionable, and prevention and sex education are both useful and necessary, both explanations seem to overlook the underlying meaning of parenthood for teens. It is striking that the majority of the participants in this study embraced fatherhood and experienced it as a vehicle to find new purpose and meaning in their lives. The findings of this paper suggest the need to recognize the potential

purpose and meaning for life that fatherhood might entail and to facilitate early and targeted formal support, services, and programming for young fathers before the window of opportunity closes (and the father disengages). Researchers, policy makers, health professionals, and workers in social service agencies need to look beyond the "good" versus "bad" father dichotomy to learn more about the complexities of teen fatherhood, opportunities to support young fathers in a meaningful way, and about processes and factors that may facilitate or impede young father involvement.

Paper 3

The purpose of the third paper was to investigate, from the perspective of agency staff and young fathers involved in services, which key factors were critical in successfully reaching out to young fathers and providing them with meaningful support. This paper addresses the current lack of services and programming targeted to young fathers' needs (Ashbourne, 2006), by identifying three essential factors for organizations who want to provide support to young fathers: (1) valuing and welcoming fathers (organizational changes and reaching out), (2) adopting a male perspective (adapting services and a focus on doing), and (3) providing safe and nurturing relationships. These findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by offering concrete strategies for how to successfully provide support to young fathers, since services often do not meet young fathers' needs (Weinman, Smith, & Buzi, 2002) and access to support services remains difficult for most young fathers (Wilkes, Mannix, & Jackson, 2011).

The findings of this paper also align with existing research that found young fathers feel excluded from services, fear being judged by organizations, and benefit most from adapted services that recognize their needs (Deslauriers, Devault, Groulx, Sevigny, 2012; Ross, Church, Hill, Seaman, & Roberts, 2012). The third key factor identified in this study, providing safe and nurturing relationships, has received little attention to date and adds an important aspect to this body of research. Typically services have ignored young fathers' emotional needs, even in the delivery of services specifically tailored to males. Nevertheless, in a recent review of strategies to engage fathers in social services Maxwell and her colleagues identified fear as one of the main reasons for fathers' reluctance to enroll in and access services. They described fathers' reluctance to seek and use services as stemming from

> a fear that they cannot be good fathers for their children; a fear that involvement with the child welfare system will exacerbate their problems with the criminal justice system; fear that relationships with current partners not related to the child would be affected; fear of losing custody of children; and, for fathers in difficult circumstances, a perception that the system is not there to help them. (Maxwell et al., 2012, p. 163-164)

Thus, further research needs to explore ways to improve emotional support of young fathers in a service environment that feels safe and non-judgmental to them. Given that it took *Terra* several years of trial and error involving significant effort and change within the agency to adapt their services

to the needs of young fathers, it is not surprising that social and family support services continue to face difficulties in accessing and engaging men (Maxwell et al., 2012).

Another issue that emerged but could not be sufficiently explored in this study is the apparent lack of funding to implement and maintain formal support and services for young fathers. For instance, although financial and educational support (in form of internships or stipends) increases young fathers' ability to provide for their families and remain involved in their children's lives (Kost, 1997), such funding is typically not readily available for young fathers (R. Wells, Coordinator at *Terra*, personal communication, November 5, 2012). This lack of sufficient funding for young fathers is documented in a research study that found the vast majority of Canadian organizations face financial challenges in providing formal support and services to young fathers (Devault, Gaudet, Bolte, & St-Denis, 2005). Since the social support system in North America was originally developed to support women and their children, more significant changes are required to equally support men.

Formal social support seems to be more critical for adolescent fathers than for adult fathers, particularly in increasing their involvement with their children (Fagan & Lee, 2011). When young fathers do not have access to the support they need, they are forced towards the margins of society, which is linked with disempowerment and deprivation from material resources and social goods (Luttrell, 2003). Thus, social service agencies need to adapt and specifically target young fathers as their clientele, ideally before the baby is born

or at the time of birth (Ross et al., 2012). Further research is needed to explore and facilitate this process to more successfully include and support young fathers, as it has considerable benefits for their own, their children's and their children's mother's well-being. Unfortunately, this line of thought is not popular yet. Fagan and Lee, for instance, comment as follows: "Only recently have programs begun to consider that helping adolescent mothers and their children also involves providing support to adolescent fathers" (2011, p. 247).

Conclusion

On the one hand, the findings of this dissertation seem discouraging, since teen fathers are difficult to engage in research, and their needs remain underexplored and under-addressed by support agencies and programming. On the other hand, findings of this dissertation give reason for hope, as it is possible for young fathers to overcome some of their severe adversities and to find purpose and meaning through fatherhood. Furthermore, the experiences and success and of a non-profit organization in providing meaningful support to vulnerable young fathers despite limited financial means and resources suggests strategies for successfully engaging young fathers in services and supporting their ongoing involvement in their children's lives.

A limitation of this dissertation is the small samples of self-selected participants on which the findings and conceptualizations of the three papers are based. Nevertheless, all three papers contribute to the growing body of knowledge on young fathers by arguing for a more critical and fruitful debate on how to conduct research with young fathers, how to frame young fatherhood in

the current discourse, and how to support them more successfully. In this regard, this dissertation identifies some of the most problematic areas in research and practice on teen fatherhood and offers some promising directions in how to engage with, learn more about, and successfully support young fathers. This dissertation further contributes to the body of research proposing that teen fatherhood is an often overlooked but important and complex part of teen parenthood in North America and requires thoughtful, responsive, and more extensive answers through social programs and policies (García Coll & Vázquez García, 1996).

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Appendix A: Invitation for study 1:

YOU ARE INVITED

To Participate in the "Teen Dads" Study

What is it?

My name is Nicolette Sopcak and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta. To get my degree I have to do a research project. Since the goal of my study is to learn more about teenage fathers, I want to interview young dads. If you are a teen dad or were a teen dad, I invite you to participate in my study. I would like to talk to you about what it's like for you to be a teen dad. What is your story?

Who can participate?

Young men who became fathers or will become fathers under the age of 20.

What will I have to do?

If you agree to participate, I'd like to talk to you once or twice for about 45 minutes to an hour and half each time. I have some general questions that I 'd like to ask you about what it is like to be a teen dad. You will get a $20 Safeway gift card after each interview to thank you for your time.

Do I have to participate?

Your participation is completely voluntary. There is NO penalty for NOT participating. If you are connected with an agency (e.g., Terra or Bent Arrow), you will still get all the same services and support you have been receiving from them if you choose to participate in the research study or not.

If you are interested in participating please call me at (780) 248 1517 (please leave a message if I am not in)

Thank you!

Nicolette

Appendix B: Script for oral consent

Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
302 Human Ecology Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1
Phone: (780) 492-3824
Fax: (780) 492-4821

Teen Father Involvement Study – Consent Form: Verbal script

Okay, before we go any further, do you have any questions about what I just said [or: what you just read on the letter]? [wait a bit so that participant can think about questions… answer questions]

I also want to check with you that you understand that I am asking you to be in my study. That means that we would meet once or twice to talk between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. Again, being in my study is completely voluntary. If you don't want to participate, that's really o.k. Or if you decide to be in the study and while we talk you decide you don't want to be in it anymore, that's o.k. too. That won't hurt my feelings. Just let me know and we will just stop talking. And if you change your mind up to 2 weeks after we talk, I can either destroy the tape or give it to you. O.K? [wait for participant's response]

Also, I want to make sure that you know that if you decide to end the interview that Terra will still provide all the same support and services to you (if you receive any). And I also want to make sure that you know who may listen to the tape: I will listen to it, my supervisor might listen to it and the lady who will type it for me. Would that be o.k. with you? [wait for participant's response]

So, do you think you'd like to participate? [wait for participant's response]

Would it be o.k. with you if I tape our conversation? [wait for participant's response]

Would you give me permission to use the information we talk about in presentations and research reports? I would NOT include your name or any other identifying information about you and your family [wait for participant's response]

After the interview I will ask participants:

May I contact you in approximately 6 to 12 months to see if you would be interested in participating in another interview?

Circle One: YES NO

Please provide your contact information below:

Phone (home): _____

Phone (cell): _____

Email: _____

Appendix C: Script for oral consent photo-interviewing

Hi _____,

It's nice to see you again. Thank you again for talking with me last time and giving me such great information about being a teen dad. I'd like to learn more about how you see the world around you. You know that old saying "a picture is worth a thousand words"? If you are o.k. with it, what I'd like to ask you to do is to take some pictures over the next week of things that are important to you in your life. It would be great if you could make pictures of things, people, or places that make you feel like a dad or think about being a dad. There is no right or wrong about what you take pictures of.

It can be things, people or places that

- you wonder about
- you like or don't like
- you see every day or that you only see once (while you have the camera)
- make you laugh
- make you angry, sad, or happy, etc…

After a week or so, I will develop the pictures and we will meet again for half an hour to an hour to talk about them. Just like when we talked before, I would like to audiotape our talk if it's o.k. with you.

When we get together to talk, I will have two sets of copies of the pictures: One set for you to keep and one for me to keep. And then, if it's o.k. with you and if you're up for it, I might give you a second camera and ask you to take pictures for another week. But you can decide that later whether you want to do that or not.

I won't show the pictures to anybody and will store them in a locked file cabinet in my office at the University of Alberta. If I would like to use a picture for a presentation or a report, I would ask you first if you are o.k. with it. If you don't want me to use the picture, I won't use it. That's no problem at all.

If you take a picture of other people in a public place such as the street, the mall or a playground we can just use the picture. But if you take picture of other people and/or their children at their home, then we would need them to sign a form to let us use the picture(s).

Do you have any questions?

Would you like to participate in the study?

[Yes] [No] _____ (Researcher's initials)

Here's the camera. There are about 20 pictures on the camera. Have fun with this and make sure you get some pictures of things that you really want to get pictures of.

Appendix D: Agreement to allow public use of identifying information

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
EDMONTON, ALBERTA, CANADA

Department of Human Ecology
302 Human Ecology Building
Edmonton AB T6G 2N1
tel: 780-492-3824
fax: 780-492-4821
www. ales.ualberta.ca/hecol

Agreement to Allow Public Use of Identifying Information

I, _____, agree that Nicolette Sopcak can use the following image(s) for presentations and publications on the Father Involvement research project.

Insert image(s) here:

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name	Participant signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Witness Name	Witness signature	Date

Appendix E: Interview guide study 1:

Interview guide for 1st interview with teen fathers

1. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself (age, work situation, family etc.)
2. Could you please describe the typical routine of your day?
3. How is it to be a dad? (expected or different?)
4. Do you have custody of your child(ren)?
5. What is the current situation with the mother of your child(ren)?
6. What did you think when you found out that you were going to be a father?
7. What was your situation when you became a father (probes re: schooling, employment)
8. What is your situation today?
9. What are the things you enjoy about being a father?
10. What are some of the things you find challenging about being a father?
11. How often do you see your child? (probes re: visitation arrangements, parenting responsibilities)
12. Who supports you as a father?
13. How do you see your future
14. In an ideal world, what kind of support would you need to be the father you would like to be?
15. If you had 3 wishes for your child in 20 years, what would they be?

Probes for 2nd interview – photovoice

16. Could you please describe this picture?
17. How did it make you think of your child/being a dad?
18. How do you feel about this picture?
19. What does it mean to you?

Appendix F: Interview guide study 2 (staff):

Questions to Terra Staff:

- Please describe your role/function at Terra
- Is Terra successful in providing services for young dads?
    - 1. Probe: How?
    - 2. Probe: Can you think of one point in time or a specific situation or moment working with teen dads, where you thought or felt "this is successful"?
- How did your organizations' missions statement change with your integration of dads' services?
- How are services to teen dads different from those to teen moms?
    - Probe: How do you recruit teen dads?
    - Do you think your agency is "male-friendly"? In which ways (not)?
- Did you face challenges in developing services for teen dads? If so, which challenges and how did your agency respond to these challenges?
- What keeps you motivated to continue providing services for dads?
- Do you assess how well you meet teen dads' needs? If so, how?
- How do you envision services for teen dads in the future? Any wishes?

Appendix G: Interview guide study 2 (clients):

Questions to teen dads:

- How did you learn about Terra?
- What motivated you to get in contact with Terra?
- Did you contact other agencies/organizations? If yes, what was your experience with these?
- What was your personal situation at the time you contacted Terra?
- Has this situation changed since that day? How
- How would you describe Terra? (3 words/characteristics)
- How was Terra helpful to you (or not)?
- Was there a situation where could Terra NOT help you although you needed it?
- Do you feel that Terra meets your needs as man and father? How?
- Would you consider Terra a “male-friendly” organization? Why? Why not?
- In your opinion, what could Terra do to improve their services?