

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT FATHERS

The Lived Experiences of the Adolescent Father in Northern Virginia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of adolescent fathers in a suburban environment in Northern Virginia. Specifically, phenomenological methods were used to capture the essence of these nine adolescent fathers' experiences surrounding their conceptualization and enactment of fatherhood. Participants included 5 Hispanic (56%), 2 African-American (22%), 1 Caucasian (11%), and 1 Asian (11%). They ranged in age from 16 to 19 years of age with an average age of 18. Their perspective adds to the current literature and assists counselors and policy makers in gaining a greater understanding of the needs and perceptions of this marginalized group. A *transformative process* best described the lived experience of these adolescent fathers. Fatherhood was described as a life-changing event, as they traversed a range of negative behaviors to become actively involved fathers. An eco-constructivist model provided an appropriate framework to better understand the subjective meanings the adolescent fathers attached to their lived experiences throughout the *transformative process*. While the results cannot be generalized, the narratives of these participants provide insight into this marginalized population. These participants define fatherhood in traditional terms (i.e., father as primary provider) and expressed enthusiasm about being actively involved in their children's daily lives. Further, the majority expressed a renewed focus on educational attainment to provide a better future for themselves and their children. Although participants received assistance from their families, support was lacking from the educational system. This lack of support provides an avenue for communities, schools, and counselors to become advocates for adolescent fathers. School counselors are encouraged to reach out to community agencies, clinical mental health counselors, and community college counselors as avenues for more complete services for adolescent fathers. There is a need for further research relating to the needs of adolescent fathers. Longitudinal research with these participants is necessary to ascertain how they enacted their conceptualization of fatherhood and the barriers they encountered.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The issues surrounding adolescent fatherhood are complex and call for greater inquiry. This inquiry must include the voice of the adolescent father. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of literature focusing on the lived experience of the adolescent father leading to their marginalization. Further, there is also a void in community-based (Miller, 1997) and educational services (Lane & Clay, 2000) for this population. The lack of empirical research and programs inclusive of the adolescent father affect more than just the adolescent parents and their offspring. Adolescent parenthood is an issue of national concern as the associated costs are linked to the lack of educational completion for adolescent parents and the cycle of poverty that often accompanies this population (Jordan-Zachery, 2009; Paschal, 2006; Weinman, Smith, & Buzi, 2002).

While some may consider adolescent pregnancy and parenting to be an inner-city issue, this overlooks the actual costs associated with adolescent pregnancy and parenting. Analysis by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy show that adolescent births cost taxpayers approximately \$10.9 billion each year. In Virginia, the cost to taxpayers was \$215 million in 2008 (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2011). The costs associated with adolescent parenting clearly make this phenomenon more than just an inner-city issue; these costs affect the lives of most Americans.

Since becoming a public issue during the 1970s, research related to adolescent parenting has focused on the adolescent mother and child (Furstenberg, 1985; Paschal, 2006; Pirog-Good, 1995; Rozie-Battle, 2003). It was not until the 1990s that the literature began to reflect the adolescent father's role in the family. Some of the earlier studies reflected the societal view that adolescent parenting, particularly adolescent fathers, operated within the realm of deviant behavior with pregnancy a symptom of those behaviors (Furstenberg, 1985; Paschal, 2006). Adolescent fathers were often blamed for being an absent or uninvolved parent, leaving the burden of raising his children to the adolescent mother and the larger society. While this may be the case for some adolescent fathers, a review of the more recent literature indicates many expressed the desire to care for their children.

While the larger society champions the adult father's active involvement in his children's lives, the adolescent father image continues to be defined by negative stereotypes. Unfortunately,

the literature, prior to the 1990s, relating to adolescent fathers was not particularly helpful in changing the prevailing opinions associated with this population. Indeed, early research focused on negative depictions of adolescent fathers. More recent literature has limited the focus to inner-city adolescent fathers who struggle with the resources to enact their vision of fatherhood (Paschal, 2006). Despite these stereotypes, there is increasing evidence that teen fathers want to be (and are) involved with their children, though this involvement may not always include financial support (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Evidence suggests that many adolescent fathers are actively involved and invested in the daily care of their offspring (Dornig et al., 2006; Sullivan, 1989).

The adolescent father faces many seen and unseen challenges as he navigates the transition to parenthood. For instance, adolescent fathers are often unfairly compared to older married fathers and unfairly stereotyped when they do not adequately meet those comparisons (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Gavin, 2002). As a result, they consistently face the characterizations as being (a) not committed to their child; (b) absent from financial responsibility; (c) lack connection with their child; and (d) involved with at-risk, criminal, or delinquent behavior.

While unseen to the adolescent father, his view of fatherhood may also contribute to his difficulty in enacting the role of father. The literature informs us that many adolescent fathers cite the traditional role of financial supporter as the primary responsibility of the father (Dornig et al., 2006; Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). Attempts to enact this traditional role are often hindered by the adolescent father's maturity level, lack of educational achievement, and limited employment experience leaving many adolescent fathers discouraged and disillusioned (Dornig et al., 2006; Paschal, 2006). Without the developmental maturity to adapt to this disappointment, the adolescent father's involvement decreases over time (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007).

It is malfeasant that the adolescent father has been largely ignored by policy makers, social service providers, and programs through community agencies, and educational programs and services where the primary focus has been on the needs of the adolescent mother and child (Rozie-Battle, 2003). The adolescent father's exclusion from services offered by community agencies and schools alike, despite prior research indicating their desire to be involved, indicates a need to better understand their perspective and provide appropriate services to this population. Change begins by listening to the voice of adolescent fathers' and the narratives of their lived experiences.

The path from adolescence to adulthood is considered a stressful and challenging time; adding fatherhood to this transition greatly increases the pressure on adolescent fathers (Rozie-Battle, 2003). Understanding how adolescent fathers experience fatherhood is vital for those in educational and community agency settings to better assist them during the difficult transition into parenthood. For many adolescent fathers the need to pursue employment comes at the expense of his educational requirements. Without attaining minimum educational requirements, they lack marketable skills and face a lifetime of lower wages, higher unemployment, and greater risk of criminal activity (Pirog-Good, 1995). School counselors play a vital role in keeping the adolescent father focused on school completion through career, personal, and academic counseling. School counselors and community providers will benefit from becoming more knowledgeable about the experiences and perceptions of adolescent fathers to assist them during this major life event.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of a purposive sample of adolescent fathers in a suburban environment in Northern Virginia. The focus of this exploration was to gain a greater understanding of the needs and perceptions of this marginalized group. This study adds a more diverse perspective to the literature on adolescent fatherhood since much of the research relating to adolescent parenting has focused on either the maternal parent or negative portrayals of the adolescent father (Paschal, 2006).

The adolescent father's narrative has yet to be adequately included in the literature relating to adolescent parenting (Dornig et al., 2006; Fagot, Pears, Capaldi, Crosby, & Leve, 1998). The adolescent father's perspective represents a vital piece to the adolescent parenting phenomenon. While some researchers have included the perspective of the minority adolescent father in the inner-city, few have looked beyond the urban areas to explore the view of the adolescent father in suburban locales. To better understand the needs of this population, the literature must expand to reflect the diversity of adolescent fathers themselves and recognize that adolescent parenting is not isolated to inner city environments. As a result, this study utilized a diverse group of adolescent fathers including those of African-American, Hispanic and Caucasian ethnicity in a suburban setting.

Research Questions

This study provided adolescent fathers a safe, inviting platform from which to narrate and construct their story. The research questions focused on the adolescent father's lived experiences by capturing the essence of the participant's view of and behaviors as a father. The semi-structured question format explored the adolescent father's life before becoming a father, his current fatherhood experiences, and his personal reflection of fatherhood. The research questions that guided the proposed study included the following:

How would you describe your life before becoming a father?

As a father, what are your current experiences with your child?

In your own words, how do you describe what it means to be a father?

Definition of Terms

Specific terms related to the proposed study are defined to assist in understanding the context of the research. Definitions are based grounded in the literature and include the following:

Adolescent father - To maintain consistency with the statistics used in this research, an adolescent father is a male age 15 to 19 who has fathered a child (Ventura, Matthews, & Hamilton, 2001).

African-American - A Black American of African ancestry that includes those with origins in any Black racial groups of Africa (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011).

Caucasian - A person who identifies race as "White" and those with ancestry from original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011).

Enactment - The actions (i.e., behaviors) that accompany fatherhood. In this study, enactment is how the adolescent father displays his involvement with his offspring (Palkovitz & Palm, 2009).

Father - The male biological parent (Tanfer & Mott, 1997).

Fatherhood - The act of fatherhood begins with the birth of a child and the actions that surround caring for the child (Draper, 2003). However, There is no universally accepted definition of fatherhood. There is also no universally accepted definition of what constitutes being a father. Historically, the father has been viewed as the head of the household and the primary provider in the family (M Lamb, 2000). The parental practices are too varied to limit to a single definition.

Generative perspective – The actions fathers perform for the betterment of their child and future generations (Hernandez, 2002; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006). The generative perspective recognizes a varied array of childrearing contributions outside of the traditional model of father as provider. This perspective is useful for nonresidential and adolescent fathers by recognizing the father’s contributions beyond the provider role, such as, involvement in childcare duties, educational involvement, and spiritual guidance (Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1996)

Hispanic - The literature uses both Hispanic and Latino interchangeably. The Pew Hispanic Center, a research organization designed to improve the understanding of the Hispanic population in the United States, recommends using the terms interchangeably (Center, 2005; Fry & Gonzales, 2008). In accord with the U.S. Census and for the purpose of this study, the term Hispanic will be used to identify adolescent fathers of Latin American ancestry from Mexican, Puerto Rican, Central or South American, or other Latino origins (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003)

Summary

Chapter one provides an overview of the pertinent literature, purpose of the study, research questions, and definitions in support of a proposed qualitative study of adolescent fathers. The need for additional research is evident by the high cost associated with adolescent parenting, negative stereotypes, and challenges facing this population. This phenomenon not only affects the adolescent parents and their offspring but also financially impacts the larger society. The proposed study sets the stage for adolescent fathers to provide a narrative in their own voice to address the stereotypes attributed to them and to provide greater insight into their needs as young parents.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature relating to fatherhood, specifically the adolescent father. Because of the dearth of literature relating to the adolescent father, the review focuses on what is known about fatherhood and nonresidential fathers before narrowing the focus to the adolescent father. The chapter includes a historical overview of fatherhood, the changes within fatherhood during the 20th century, and the shift in fatherhood from a deficit to a generative perspective. Pertinent statistical information about adolescent parenting is included. A conceptual framework based on theory and research is presented to guide the proposed study.

Chapter three provides a description of the qualitative study. The rationale for using qualitative methods, participant selection, interview protocol, and research procedures are

detailed. This chapter presents the methods and procedures that were used in this study. In addition, the research design, sample description and size, data collection procedures, and questionnaires were detailed, as well as the content analysis methods used to evaluate and interpret data.

Chapter four provides an overview of the methods used to reach saturation in this study. It also contains profiles of the participants in this study. The profiles introduce the participants and include their response to research questions. Whenever possible, I used the participants' quotes to answer each question. This chapter also contains discussions on the common and divergent themes that emerged from interviews of the 9 adolescent fathers who participated in this study. In accordance with the phenomenological approach, this chapter includes the essence of the participants lived experience common to all or most participants. It concludes with a summary of the information presented in this chapter.

Chapter five provides a discussion on how the results of this study correlate to the literature, the theoretical relevance of the research, and the study limitations. The implications for school counselors and further research conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature supports the need for continuing study to better understand the phenomenon of adolescent fatherhood. Unfortunately, negative stereotypes and marginalization dominate the research completed before the 1990s. This has resulted in depressed research and limited services that could have assisted this population (Wiemann, Agurcia, Rickert, Berenson, & Volk, 2006). Social service agencies and schools generally have devoted more resources to the child and mother to the exclusion of the adolescent father (Allen & Doherty, 1996). However, it is through building a better understanding that negative stereotypes associated with this population can be addressed and the unique needs can be met. Continuing the study of adolescent fathers will provide research in support of increased services from community organizations and in educational settings to better meet the needs this population.

Before the surge in research during the 1990s, few articles focused on the adolescent father and fewer pursued the developmental differences between this population and other fathers (e.g., residential, divorced, fathers separated from their children). The adolescent father was considered the forgotten parent by researchers (Barret & Robinson, 1986; Rivara, 1981), stereotyped as an irresponsible parent by practitioners (Miller, 1997), disregarded by social work practitioners (Miller, 1997), and viewed as a delinquent by policymakers (Miller, 1997; Paschal, 2006). Early studies of adolescent fathers even assumed adolescent fathers were psychologically unstable (Glikman, 2004). Despite recent literature challenging the stereotypes, the myths that characterize the adolescent father remain (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Doring et al., 2006; Nelson, 2004).

Beginning in 1990s, there was an increase in the number of professional journals that published articles with a focus on fatherhood. Signifying the importance of this topic, some journals devoted special issues to the study of fatherhood, namely *Families in Societies* (1993), *Journal of Family Issues* (1993, 1994, 1999), *Demography* (1998), *Journal of Men's Studies* (1998), *Journal of Family History* (2000), and *Marriage and Family Review* (2000). The literature shifted the adolescent father from marginalized parent to a recognized part of a complex puzzle that makes up the phenomenon of teen parenting. It also effectively encouraged more qualitative study, leading to increased exploration of the adolescent father's worldview and developmental needs.

The increase in qualitative study over the last 20 years has encouraged exploration of the thoughts, perceptions, struggles, and fears of the adolescent father. Studies by Sullivan (1989) and Paschal (2006) advise that the adolescent father may lack the developmental, financial, and experiential tools of more experienced fathers; yet he expresses a desire to be actively involved in his child's life. The use of qualitative research has helped challenge long held negative stereotypes and advanced the definition of fatherhood to include a generative perspective thus providing a forum for the adolescent father to add his narrative to the body of literature.

What is a Father?

There is no universally accepted definition of fatherhood, and there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes being a father. Historically, the father has been viewed as the head of the household and the primary provider in the family (Lamb, 2000). While that may be a predominant role of the father, it is neither one-dimensional nor historically accurate for all fathers. This is an important point because many adolescent fathers model adult fathers with this restrictive definition of fatherhood (Paschal, 2006). Unfortunately, one of the predictors of adolescent father involvement is the ability to provide financial support (Paschal, 2006; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009). If the adolescent father is unable to meet these needs, he withdraws from participating in his child's life completely (Lamb, 2000; Paschal, 2006).

A review of the literature directs attention to four social trends (see Table 2.1) that have altered the family structure, namely dual income families, variation in father involvement, increase in nonresidential fathers, and minority cultural parenting practices (Cabrera, Tamis-Lemonda, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). Some scholars go even further in suggesting that these trends triggered fundamental changes in the structure of the American family. These four trends have shifted our view of fatherhood from the traditional model (e.g., head of household, primary provider) to a *generative perspective* that relates to the actions a father takes for the betterment of the child and future generations (Hernandez, 2002; Summers et al., 2006). This perspective provides a more realistic approach to fatherhood based on one's contextual circumstances including employment status and monetary resources (Wilkinson et al., 2009).

Table 2.1*Trends in Fatherhood during the 20th Century (Cabrera et al., 2000; Lamb, 2000)*

Decade	Historical Trends
1930s	Increase in dual income families during and after World War II
1940s, 1950s	Noticeable variation in father involvement activities
1960s	Dramatic rise in number of nonresidential fathers
1970s	Inclusion of minority cultural parenting practices into mainstream society

These social trends greatly influenced fatherhood and father involvement in the 20th century. They also highlighted the changing family unit and the evolving, more mature conceptualization of fatherhood (Cabrera et al., 2000). Over a period of approximately 70 years, the maternal parent became more involved in the work force, and the paternal parent became more involved in the daily household activities. Further blurring traditional parental roles, once delineated along gender lines, was the father's increased involvement in childcare. The father's role shifted from the provider to include more nurturing and child rearing responsibilities (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999; Lamb, 2000).

Due to their involvement in World War II, the absence of fathers triggered dramatic changes in parenting roles. Mothers' increased entry into the workforce was a shift from the traditional homemaker role that forced families to adjust. This trend continued after the war because of the economic necessity for dual incomes. Statistically, the percentage of women entering the workforce, over the 40-year period following World War II, increased from 12% in 1950 to 66% by 1997 (J. Pleck, 2007). These changes required more fathers to adapt to the increasing number of mothers working outside the home and to adjust to co-parenting responsibilities (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004).

The necessity to co-parent sparked the second trend as fathers increasingly adapted to their role as caregivers. This trend began taking root in the 1960s as more fathers took on a wider variation of childrearing activities within the family (Cabrera et al., 2000). During this period, father involvement in daily childcare activities became a socially acceptable concept, even if it was not widely recognized in the literature. Cabrera et al. recognized this period as a time when father involvement began evolving into an active, diverse construct.

In contrast to the timeline of Cabrera et al. (2000), Lamb (2000) identified the mid-1970s as the period that fathers became more actively involved in all aspects of parenting. He recognized that the father's role as co-parent may have begun earlier but credits this later period as the time fathers actively accepted their new role that included day-to-day care giving. Lamb cites the portrayal of fathers in the media and mainstream society as examples of the father being a nurturer who is also actively involved in daily childrearing. The nurturing father became the standard for father involvement (Lamb, 2000).

The dramatic rise in the number of nonresidential fathers was the third social trend. Single-parent homes rose from 6% to 24% between 1960 and 1990 with the vast majority headed by the maternal parent. Indeed, by the end of the 20th century, the increase in non-residential fathers, divorced parents, and out-of-wedlock children born to single-women altered the family unit and the way parents interacted with each other and their children (Cabrera et al., 2000; U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). The result was an increased involvement in child-care by some fathers coinciding with increased absence from others, forcing more mothers to work and seek support for their extended family (Cabrera et al., 2000).

The fourth social trend was the increasing influence various cultures have played in transforming the concept of father involvement. Just as economic necessity compelled fathers to evolve, the assimilation of the parenting practices from different cultures into mainstream society pushed the conceptualization and enactment of fatherhood beyond its traditional construct (Cabrera et al., 2000). The increased influence of various minority cultures into the mainstream society during the 1960s challenged scholars to view father involvement outside of the value set of the white, upper middle-class American family's perspective that had been the standard in research (Cabrera et al., 2000; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999).

Cultural adaptations by minority parents were often the result of being isolated from mainstream society with limited financial and community resources at their disposal (Cabrera et al., 2000; E. Pleck & Pleck, 1997). For example, many minority parents worked outside of the home because of their socioeconomic status before it became an acceptable concept in mainstream society (King et al., 2004). Additionally, researchers have noted that African American and some Hispanic subgroups rely on extended family members to compensate for the lack of financial and community resources available (Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). This

increased exposure and assimilation of minority groups into mainstream society helped define and reshape fatherhood (Allen & Doherty, 1996).

These four social trends provided the impetus for fathers to adapt in a changing environment. Economic necessity, structural changes, and cultural resources combined to alter the family structure. With the father no longer claiming exclusive rights in the traditional role as head of household and provider, the concept of father involvement evolved into a multifaceted construct (Lamb, 2000).

Fatherhood as a Multifaceted Construct

The concept of fatherhood grew immeasurably during the 20th century with contributions from the aforementioned social trends. This growth encouraged social science researchers to find the most appropriate conceptualization for fatherhood. The primary challenge to find consensus centered on whether the construct of fatherhood is a one-dimensional or multifaceted construct (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000).

While the literature began to reflect fatherhood as a multifaceted concept, studies have shown that many adolescent fathers hold onto the traditional view that limits fatherhood to the concept of being the provider. While the multifaceted construct is more realistic for the adolescent father, the traditional model remains engrained in our society (Lamb, 2000). It is not surprising that the adolescent father holds onto the provider concept of fatherhood. Pressure from peers and religious ideology continue to identify the male as the head of the household (Paschal, 2006). The mixed messages are confusing as even academic scholars struggle to define the construct of fatherhood (Lamb, 2000).

While Lamb (2000) identified fatherhood as a multifaceted construct, he recognized that one theme might have been more dominant than others at various periods in history. Based on this theory, four historical phases of fatherhood and father involvement are differentiated to illustrate fatherhood as a multifaceted construct but with each period occupying a specific phase of dominance (e.g., father as a moral teacher during Colonial Times). Lamb's phases of fatherhood are identified as the Moral Teacher, the Breadwinner, the Same-Sex Role Model, and the New Nurturing Father (see Table 2.2).

Lamb (2000) traced fatherhood from the Colonial period to the period of centralized industrialization where he identified the dominant theme of that period as the father as a moral guide. This period was followed by the father as the breadwinner and lasted until the Great

Depression. Lamb marked the third phase of fatherhood as the same-sex role model, which recognized the father as the financial and moral guide but primarily focused on him being a strong role model, particularly for his son. This phase began after World War II and led to the father as a nurturer. This fourth stage, the New Nurturing Father, began around the mid-1970s and identified the father's growth as an active and willing participant in daily childrearing activities.

Table 2.2

Phases of Fatherhood (Lamb, 2000)

Historical Period	Phases of Fatherhood and Father Involvement
Colonial period to Industrialization	Moral Teacher
Industrialization to Great Depression	Breadwinner
Following WWII	Same-Sex Role Model
Mid-1970s to present	New Nurturing Father

Conversely, Marsiglio and associates (2000) separated these phases into specific periods where one was the dominant motif but advised that the other roles coexisted concurrently. For example, the economic provider has historically been a major part of the father's role, just as fathers have always considered themselves the primary provider and same-sex role model.

Recent literature supports Marsiglio's view of fatherhood as a multifaceted construct with various themes existing concurrently. Qualitative studies by Paschal (2006) and Sullivan (1989) provide evidence that fathers, specifically adolescent fathers, apply each of the themes when defining their vision of fatherhood. The fathers describe themselves as feeling responsible for the moral compass of their family, providing financial support, and being actively involved in child rearing. By obtaining narratives from the fathers themselves, instead of relying on stereotypes, we can surmise that some adolescent fathers recognize the importance of being a multifaceted contributor in their child's life.

Redefining Fatherhood

The adolescent father may not be the only one benefiting from a broadened definition of fatherhood. Buoyed by the four social trends outlined in Table 2.1, expanded constructs of

fatherhood, developmental considerations, and the increased literature published during the 1990s, scholars began pursuing more complex conceptualizations of fatherhood (Bruce & Fox, 1997; Lamb, 2000; Lamb, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). The recent literature reflects scholarly attempts to redefine involvement as a multifaceted construct that reflects a wide variation of activities (Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald, 2001; King et al., 2004; M Lamb, 2000). This is paving the way for a more mature and encompassing conceptualization of understanding what is meant by involvement that is inclusive of the child's and the father's development (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). These conceptualizations benefit the adolescent father in his attempts to navigate fatherhood and adolescence. The adolescent father's lack of involvement may not be intentional in disregarding his child; instead, his behaviors may be the developmentally appropriate behavior of a teenager.

A variety of terms have been used to describe who and what is a father (see Table 2.3). Regardless of the terms used, each of these perspectives broadened the definition of fatherhood into a multifaceted and generative construct. Scholars are increasingly viewing fatherhood, particularly adolescent fatherhood, from a generative perspective because of its multifaceted and developmental properties. While there is no consensus on how the generative perspective is enacted (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998), scholars recognize that it focuses on the positive contributions of the father (Almeida et al., 2001). Further distancing from the deficit perspective, a generative perspective includes the nonresidential parent and other non-traditional fathers, such as adolescent fathers, into discussions on fatherhood (Almeida et al., 2001; Marsiglio et al., 2000; McLanahan, Garfinkel, Reichman, & Teitler, 2001).

Table 2.3

Terms Used in the Literature Related to Father

Authors	Terms	Foci
Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson (1998)	<i>good father</i>	Identify the multilevel approach to parenting
Hawkins & Palkovitz (1999)	<i>fatherwork</i>	Broadening the scope of fatherhood
Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald (2001)	<i>new fatherhood</i>	Father's nurturing activities
Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes (2006)	<i>good father</i>	Generative approach to how a father should act

Under the generative umbrella, the father performs a variety of actions for the betterment of his child and future generations (Summers et al., 2006). The ability to perform a variety of duties has led researchers to seek a more appropriate definition befitting the father's varied actions. This new direction has been marked by terms like *new fatherhood* (Almeida et al., 2001) or *good father* (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). At the same time, the new direction has continued to coexist with those who limit fatherhood to the traditional model of father as the provider and head of household (Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Increased attention on this generative perspective has encouraged scholars to seek new terminology for fatherhood that appropriately portray this *new fatherhood* and is more befitting of the father's nurturing activities (Almeida et al., 2001). Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson (1998) used the term *good father* to identify the multilevel approach to parenting. Perhaps more important was that the term recognized the shift from the traditional perspective that limited fathers to the role of financial providers to one who shares childrearing duties with his partner. Other scholars have searched for new terminology to not only address the changing public view of fathering roles but to highlight the increasing attention from researchers in examining how father involvement affects the quality of father-child relations. Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999) view this generative perspective as a means of embracing the developmental benefits of increased father involvement in the lives of their children. They recognized that the nonresidential father's participation was not adequately included in the research. Since the primary measurement of father involvement was time spent in the home, researchers began questioning whether the nonresidential father's contribution was adequately measured. As a means to include this growing segment of fathers, they broadened the definition of fatherhood to include different family structures (e.g., residential, nonresidential), various cultures, and added value to previously neglected parental acts (e.g., cognitive and affective components of involvement).

As the generative perspective advanced, researchers added nuance to the existing literature by analyzing ecological factors that affected the father's level of involvement. Doherty and associates (1998) recognized that contextual features (e.g., relationship with the co-parent) along with environmental factors (e.g., poverty) and cultural considerations strongly influenced the enactment of fatherhood. Additionally, other factors, such as his relationship with his own

father, his age, his employment status, and his relationship with the child's mother and maternal family, also influenced a father's ability to enact his vision of a *good father*.

Who is the Adolescent Father?

Adolescent fathers are more likely to come from low-income communities and reside in disadvantaged communities (Pirog-Good, 1995). They also drop out of high school at higher rates and earn less money over their lifetime than their childless peers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Glikman, 2004). They are more likely to come from homes where their parents were also young parents (Christmon, 1990b; King et al., 2004; Thornberry, Smith, & Howard, 1997). Pirog-Good (1995) noted that 45% of adolescent fathers come from single parent homes. In large numbers, these patterns reach beyond the family and influence the stability of the community (Wilkinson et al., 2009).

The stereotype image of the adolescent father does not match prior research. Regardless of his socioeconomic background and age, many adolescent fathers express a desire to be involved in their child's life (Paschal, 2006). Despite their developmental maturity (Applegate, 1988) and inability to provide traditional financial support (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007), researchers indicate that the adolescent father's conceptualization of fatherhood is similar to the older married father's conceptualization to whom he is often compared.

The most appropriate person to inform us about the adolescent father is the adolescent father himself. The qualitative data from numerous studies have detailed the desire of the adolescent father to be an actively involved parent. This is illustrated in the work of Sullivan (1989), Dornig et al. (2006), and Paschal (2006). The authors are clear in stating that there are adolescent fathers who are not involved and do not have the inclination or maturity to parent their offspring. However, the majority of adolescent fathers in each study expressed a desire to take on the role of the parent and be responsible for their child.

The difference in enacting the vision of fatherhood for adolescent fathers is more often a cultural adaptation (Paschal, 2006). Sullivan's (1989) study utilized diverse participants to illustrate how members of different racial groups responded to their new role as adolescent fathers. Each racial group (African-American, White, Hispanic) responded differently based on his cultural environment. However, the limited internal and external resources often kept participants from enacting their vision of fatherhood (Dornig et al., 2006).

From prior studies, it has been demonstrated that adolescent fathers desire to be actively involved in their children's lives with several themes that have emerged. The works of Dornig et al. (2006), Paschal (2006), and Sullivan (1989) provide evidence that most adolescent father's recognize the importance of being actively involved with his children. Many expressed a desire to provide a better life for their children and help them avoid the pitfalls they experienced. Many of the adolescents in these studies also indicated they wanted to be the consistent presence in their children's lives that they lacked. The essence of these studies indicates that adolescent father has expressed a generative perspective of fatherhood, similar to adult fathers. Naturally, there were those who limited their concept of fatherhood to the traditional mode that limits involvement to financial support. However, those views do not express the essence of the combined fathers in the studies previously mentioned. Regardless of their conceptualization of fatherhood, adolescent fathers face many challenges.

Statistical Data Relating to the Adolescent Father

In a March 21, 2011, press release from The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy National Campaign, an organization dedicated to reducing teen pregnancy, Sarah Brown, CEO of The National Campaign stated that "Declines in the nation's teen birth rate are, of course, welcome news. Lower rates of teen childbearing mean more high school graduates, lower rates of child poverty, and a lighter burden on taxpayers" (p.1). Brown's statement highlights the issues surrounding teen parenting as many do drop out of school and struggle to find sustainable income (Doring et al., 2006). Brown was trumpeting a report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (2011) indicating that the teen birth rate in the United States for 2008 stands at 41.5 births per 1,000 girls age 15-19. The data marked a 2% decline in the teen birth rate for that year.

Despite recent reductions in adolescent births, the U.S. rates remain higher than any other industrialized nation (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). The high adolescent birth rates in the United States raise concerns that extend beyond the adolescent mother and father. Indeed, adolescent pregnancy impacts the larger community and present public health concerns (Paschal, 2006). National statistics (National Vital Statistics Reports, 2009) shed light on the concerns associated with the phenomenon of adolescent parenting.

Tempering any positive trends is the still high rate of pregnancies in the United States as three in ten adolescent females are pregnant by age 20. The result is staggering, as there are

more than 400,000 teen births annually. The following racial breakdown of female births highlights the high number of adolescent births that despite the decreases (Hamilton et al., 2011):

- The birth rate for non-Hispanic white female adolescents aged 15-19 decreased 4% between 2008 and 2009 (from 26.7 per 1,000 to 25.6 per 1,000).
- The birth rate for non-Hispanic black female adolescents aged 15-19 decreased 6% between 2008 and 2009 (from 62.8 per 1,000 to 59.0 per 1,000).
- The birth rate for Hispanic female adolescents aged 15-19 decreased 10% between 2008 and 2009 (from 70.0 per 1,000 to 63.6 per 1,000).

The best data available indicate that, after increasing 32% between 1986 and 1991, the birth rates accounted for by adolescent fathers aged 15 - 19 decreased 31% between 1991 and 2004 (Ventura et al., 2001). Adolescent fatherhood varies considerably by race and age. In 2001, the rate among young black men (37 per 1,000 males aged 15–19) was more than twice that among similar whites. The birthrate for those in the later stages of adolescence (18-19) was more than double those for 15-17 (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).

The preceding paragraph is the best data available because scholars question the birth rates attributed to the adolescent father for a number of reasons. Many of the teenage births to adolescent mothers involve older men (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Paschal, 2006). Adult males, according a 1991 study from the National Center for Health Statistics, impregnated approximately 60% of adolescent mothers. Bunting and McAuley (2004) reported that adult fathers were responsible for a significant number of adolescent births with adult males average age being 8.8 years older than their adolescent female partners.

Further challenging the data, many adolescent mothers do not include the paternal parent on the official record of birth (Kimball, 2004). The adolescent female does this to protect the identity of the older male partner and shield him from legal issues (Christmon, 1990a; "Fatherhood institute research summary: Young fathers", 2010; King et al., 2004; Paschal, 2006; Rasheed, 1999). Despite the lack of consistency associated with the data, the adolescent father continues to receive the brunt of the criticism for adolescent parenthood instead of the adult males who impregnate adolescent females (Paschal, 2006).

Regardless of the accuracy of the data, it tells only part of the adolescent father's story. The growing body of qualitative literature has been invaluable in providing a forum for adolescent fathers to narrate their story and provide their perception of what being a father means

to them. These narrative reports from fathers have enhanced the research findings on fatherhood and adolescent parenting (Tuffin, Rouch, & Frewin, 2010). Bunting and McAuley (2004) support the use of qualitative studies to provide a more balanced and objective view of the fathers' involvement. Paschal (2006) suggests that researchers continue delving into the father's perspective so that practitioners and social service agencies can learn more about this demographic to better address the problems associated with this population.

The qualitative work by Such (Wilson, 2009) distinguished the adolescent fathers from married and adult non-residential fathers. Despite their differences, the adolescent father's concept of fatherhood is similar to older, married fathers. Both groups express a desire to fulfill similar roles that include being involved, providing for their family, being a moral guide, and being a family protector. The difference appears to exist in the enactment of parenting behaviors, along with cultural differences. Barriers to the adolescent father's consistent involvement are his own development and maturity, the relationship he has with the maternal parent, and his (in)ability to provide financial support (Doring et al., 2006; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007; Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989).

Further, qualitative work (e.g., Allen & Doherty, 1996; Doring et al., 2006; Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989) has informed us of the discrepancy between the adolescent father's conception of fatherhood and the enactment of that role. His ability to provide consistent financial support is influenced by his low educational attainment that further limits his employment options. His belief that the father should be the moral teacher often belies his age and emotional development. His desire to be a protector is limited by his non-residential status, as the majority of adolescent father's do not live with the maternal family and child. A major gap in the literature is the resiliency of adolescent fathers: What are the circumstances that assist some to fight through the obstacles that hinder them from enacting their conceptualization of fatherhood while others are unable to navigate the hurdles of their youth to become the fathers they envision?

It is evident that the best way to answer the question "who is the adolescent father?" is to ask adolescent fathers. In her metasynthesis of ten published articles, Janice Goodman (2005) indicated that qualitative studies providing the new fathers' perspective are key to understanding their needs. While Goodman's study analyzed responses from new adult fathers, the literature informs us that similar themes run through most qualitative studies on adolescent fathers'

conceptualization and enactment of fatherhood. One of those themes is that the adolescent father expects and anticipates being actively involved. Cognizant of their responsibilities, the adolescent fathers in Dornig et al. (2006) study of primarily Hispanic participants cited the need to “grow up” and “start thinking like a parent” (p.54). They also expressed the desire to be a better parent than their father and to remain actively in the life of their child (Doring et al., 2006; Paschal, 2006).

Adolescent fathers have been realistic in describing the challenges many have faced in escaping their environment (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007; Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). Many noted the lack of opportunities and pattern of poverty existent in their neighborhoods as challenges to their enactment of fatherhood (Sullivan, 1989). The fathers were keenly aware of the expectations and pressures from various sources in their environment, as well as their own internal pressure. While not always conscious of the sources, expectations and pressures have served as barriers that often have limited the fathers’ involvement. For example, fathers with more rigid views of the father’s role were less involved (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). Adolescent fathers following the traditional role of fatherhood of provider were less involved in childrearing. The less involved parents in Paschal’s (2006) study followed a similar pattern; those who believed their primary role was to provide financial support withdrew over time if they were unable to meet those expectations.

The narratives generated from recent qualitative studies provide a portrait of the adolescent father not discussed in earlier work. While the authors note the limitations of their studies and recognize the results cannot be generalized beyond the participants, it is important to note that the patterns remain consistent across numerable studies. While there exists a range of responses across studies that explore the perceptions of this population, the most consistent is that many of the adolescent fathers have expressed a desire to be actively involved in their children’s lives.

Outcomes of Adolescent Parenting

Adolescent parenting is generally associated with negative outcomes for both the parents and the child. However, scholars are not as clear on whether the consequences of adolescent parenting are greater after the birth of the child or if it is a symptom of larger issues that precede parenthood. Futris et al. (2010) proposed that adolescent fathers face greater challenges after childbirth as adolescent parenting negatively influences the future success of the

parents and their child. Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1998) concur by citing adolescent parents' higher dropout rates that lead to low income jobs.

However, there are scholars who have suggested that negative outcomes precede the birth of the child. The literature indicates youth already distressed or in disadvantaged situations are more likely to become adolescent parents, and early parenthood simply continues the cycle of poverty (Paschal, 2006). Those supporting (Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001) this outlook believe teens who become parents are already facing the challenges associated with instability in the home, poverty, low self-esteem, and academic difficulty. Xie et al. (2001) argued that becoming a parent during adolescence might lead to increased poverty but many adolescent parents come from low-income communities.

Thornberry and associates (1997) used data from the Rochester Youth Development, an ongoing study of teenagers, to ascertain the prevalence of adolescent fatherhood in a sample of 615 adolescent men and their families. Their study supports the view that adolescent parenting is a bi-product of larger issues. One of the goals of their study was to discover antecedent characteristics of adolescent fathers. The results showed that being a racial or ethnic minority, exhibiting deviant behaviors, and coming from a structural disadvantaged home increased the risk of becoming an adolescent parent.

Mercer Sullivan's (1989) study of three diverse neighborhoods illustrated the discrepancy in resources and how they impact adolescent fathers. Those with additional familial support, neighborhood resources, and community programs fair better than those receiving limited assistance. Caucasian adolescent fathers living in a neighborhood with higher levels of homeownership, more neighborhood businesses, and greater revenue for community programs fared better than their minority counterparts. Lacking those resources, the father's in the other two neighborhoods struggled to enact their vision of fatherhood. These data suggest that adolescent parents from low socioeconomic background face greater challenges in addition to those associated with supporting a child.

Regardless of the racial background of the parent, adolescent parents and their offspring face daunting challenges. Hernandez' (Hernandez, 2002) review of the literature cited the work of Maynard (1997) to explore the outcomes of teen pregnancy. Maynard's work found that adolescent childbirth lead to many negative trends for the mother, father, and child. Maynard compared the outcomes of adolescent children who have children before turning 18 to those who

wait until age 21. While all outcomes for adolescent parents and their offspring are not detrimental, many have negative consequences. The consequences of early parenthood are more negative for those who become parents at earlier ages.

In general, the outcomes of early entry into parenthood have a negative impact on all parties (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). The child is more likely to have health issues (e.g., asthma), and they are more likely to be abused by their parent or another family member. Male children are three times as likely to face incarceration during their lifetime. Adolescent mothers remain unmarried at higher rates than their peers who delay childbirth and are more likely to receive public assistance. They also struggle to maintain employment, which contributes to their higher rate of poverty. The adolescent father earns less over his lifetime than peers who delay entry into fatherhood. This often coincides with his lower educational success due to dropping out of high school in higher numbers than their peers.

Differences exist in how individuals adapt to childrearing based on individual, familial, cultural, and environmental norms (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). For example, African-American adolescent mothers income rates are not impacted as negatively as Hispanic or white mothers. Coley and Chase-Lansdale propose that this is because the overall income levels for African-Americans are lower. However, it is more likely the result of the family support, which allows the African-American mother to stay at home while continuing her education.

Becoming a parent during adolescence presents many challenges. Ultimately, the adolescent father may either create a cycle of poverty or extend the pattern of poverty to his child (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Because of their limited education and employable skills, it becomes difficult for the adolescent father to advance his socioeconomic status without adequate familial and community support (Bunting & McAuley, 2004).

Measuring Fatherhood and Involvement

A criticism of adolescent fathers is the lack of consistent involvement in their child's life. However, measuring the involvement of adolescent fathers and non-residential parents has also been a challenge for social science researchers as well. Until recently, measuring father involvement was a temporal and physically observable occurrence. However, the rise in the number of nonresidential fathers during the 1960s and 1970s triggered the recognition among scholars that measuring father involvement by the amount of time the father spent in the home

was not an effective measure for all populations, particularly nonresidential and adolescent fathers (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999).

Measuring father involvement by time spent in the home limited recognizing other contributions from fathers. Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999) noted that measuring father involvement should not be a case of quantity over quality. Reliance on a father's residential status does not adequately measure the types of activities he engaged in while in the home nor does it explore the psychological or emotional value he adds to his family. More recent measurements include the time spent but also incorporate other observable enactments of involvement, such as direct interaction with the child (Lamb, 1997; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999).

Countering concerns that measures of father involvement were not maintaining pace with the advancing conceptualizations of fatherhood, researchers began relying more on qualitative measures, larger data sets, and more diverse participant pools. These broadened measures reflect the shift in fatherhood studies from the deficit perspective, which focused on the father's parenting deficiencies, to the generative perspective by recognizing the variety of father actions (Hernandez, 2005). Perhaps more important, qualitative studies included the father's narrative to gain his perspective on issues surrounding fatherhood.

While researchers acknowledge the need for more appropriate assessments, the search continues for a form of measurement that accounts for the father's unique contributions to the child while also addressing his own development (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). The lack of consistency across studies in defining father involvement contributes to the confusion. Various studies provide disparate definitions with many listing different activities to constitute involvement (Lamb, 2000).

Arguably, the most succinct and widely recognized breakdown of father involvement has been provided by Lamb et al. (M Lamb, 2000; M. Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987; Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006). These researchers have narrowed father involvement to three measures: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. These variables focus on the father's emotional and physical involvement, the time directly or indirectly spent with his child, and the financial components of childrearing. In a subsequent review of father involvement, Lamb (2000) reported that these terms are defined differently by different (Lamb, 2000).

Additional measures beyond quantitative methodology are necessary to appropriately account for the father's direct and indirect involvement. More scholars are utilizing measures

that reflect the diversity of fathers found in the United States (Lamb, 2000). Tuffin and associates (2010) suggest that the increased use of qualitative research enhances studies on fatherhood. They cited Marsiglio (1993) and Rhein et al. (1997) as examples of qualitative research that provide a more balanced perspective inclusive of the father's perspective.

Gathering data from a single source is another concern for researchers measuring father involvement. The use of a single source without triangulation affects the reliability and validity of the research (Creswell, 2007). Marsiglio and associates (1993) review of 72 studies on paternal involvement found that 54% used data exclusively from one source. Much of the prior research has often utilized the adolescent mother to inform researchers about the adolescent father, the factors that led to him becoming a parent, and his perceptions of fatherhood. Gavin's (2002) longitudinal study of father involvement exemplified the reliance on the maternal parent to inform researchers about the adolescent father. He used 181 first-time, urban, low-income mothers to explore the father's level of involvement, to describe how fathers enact involvement, and to identify the factors linked to the fathers' involvement.

Recent literature reflects concerns about the use of the maternal parent as the primary participant in father involvement studies (Futris, Nielsen, & Olmstead, 2010; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). While the maternal parent's perspective is useful, the validity of her perspective requires deeper consideration. When the relationship is contentious, the perspective will reflect that regardless of the father's actual level of involvement. If the relationship remains intimate, the reports are often positive, regardless of the father's actual contributions (Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989).

The use of large data sets addresses prior concerns over small sample sizes used in many qualitative studies with this population (Corcoran, 1999). The arguments that non-residential parents are inaccessible have led some social science researchers to utilize the maternal parent as the primary source of information (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994). As a result, researchers are using large-scale nationally representative longitudinal survey data sets with increasing frequency to address the concerns that fathers are not accessible. The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), High School and Beyond (HSB), the National Survey of Children (NSC) are examples of these data sets. However, the large data sets have limitations. They are limited to measuring one or two constructs and do not offer the in-depth perspective provided by smaller

qualitative samples. Many of these data sets are based on white, middle class, married samples that do not adequately capture the norms of the adolescent parent (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Despite the large numbers associated with these surveys, underreporting nonresident and adolescent fathers remains a problem (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Other data sets focus on inner-city African-American adolescent fathers, which perpetuate the stereotype that adolescent parenting is an urban issue affecting African American adolescents. This excludes a perspective from rural, suburban, middle-class, and non-minority adolescent parents (Corcoran, 1999). The combination of using constructs that may not appropriately measure its participants and using African-American males from inner city communities represents a gaping hole in the research on adolescent parenting.

While there have been gains in measuring father involvement, room exists for improvement. Basing the research on reports that include culturally diverse participants has been a focal point for scholars to provide details not previously addressed by quantitative measures (Tuffin et al., 2010). Recognizing ethnic and cultural diversity in qualitative studies as valid has proven beneficial in providing a more complete and accurate picture of fatherhood (Marsiglio et al., 2000). However, the need for increasing diverse participant pools remains in the adolescent father studies as much of the literature continues to focus on low-income African-American males (Summers et al., 2006).

Developmental Influences

Prior to the 1980s, there was limited academic interest in the adolescent father's attempts to simultaneously navigate the developmental transitions of fatherhood and adolescence (Rozie-Battle, 2003). Instead, early research was marked by a focus on child development theories and the child's developmental relationship with the maternal parent (Tuffin et al., 2010). Research relating to the paternal parent generally focused on how the father's development impacted the child (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998). Few researchers explored the influence of fatherhood on the development of the paternal parent. Even fewer explored the developmental concerns of the adolescent father, despite the intriguing dynamics inherent in the convergence of fatherhood and adolescence (Wilkinson et al., 2009).

Allen and Doherty believed this to be a rich subject area as research was scant, especially in comparison to adolescent mothers (1996). The surge in literature during the 1990s sparked research that led researchers to question the impact parenting had on a father's

development and the influence his involvement had on the child and mother (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Lamb, 2000). This intriguing developmental dilemma is marked by the adolescent father's struggle to find his identity and separate from his parents while taking on a responsibility of parenting a child and the relationship with the maternal parent (Applegate, 1988). Scholars began to recognize that the developmental concerns of adolescent fathers had the potential to ease an otherwise difficult transition with an "off-timed" event like adolescent parenting (Paschal, 2006; (Pears, Pierce, Kim, Capaldi, & Owen, 2005)

According to Deave and Johnson (2008), the transition to fatherhood is the most profound of all the developmental stages in a man's life. Further, a greater understanding of this life change, especially during adolescence, provides greater understanding of the impact this has on the father's level of involvement. As adolescence is a period of great change and a time of great uncertainty, it becomes more essential to ascertain how the adolescent father navigates through such an emotionally intense period (Frewin, Tuffin, & Rouch, 2007).

The adolescent father faces the challenge of attempting to navigate the rush of responsibilities associated with parenting while also struggling to find his place in the world (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998). While age appropriate, these developmental difficulties often manifest themselves in the adolescent father's relationship with the maternal parent. His maturity and inability to successfully negotiate complex relationship issues often negatively affects the level of involvement with his child (Doring et al., 2006; Paschal, 2006). The adolescent father's relationship with the maternal parent and her parents were commonly noted predictors of the father's level of involvement. If the father was romantically involved with the mother of his child, then he was more involved with the child. However, if his relationship with the mother was contentious, then he was more likely to avoid her and the child. The inability to separate the relationships between the maternal parent and his child is natural and attributable to his developmental level (Almeida et al., 2001; Johnson, 2001).

The work of Frewin et al. (2007) has indicated that some fathers focus on the developmental growth of their child instead of their own interests. Erik Erikson called this interest in future generations *generativity* (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998). In order to gain generativity, an individual must have a developed sense of self (identity) and security in relationships (intimacy). Christiansen and Palkovitz (1998) used Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development (1963) to explore the predictors of father involvement. Their study of adult

fathers (N=162) found that the fathers' paternal identity, psychosocial identity, and psychosocial intimacy were important factors in the fathers' level of generativity. While the results cannot be generalized to all adolescent fathers, the findings indicate that the individual's personal identity rating was the best predictor of a fathers' generativity.

Adolescent fathers have benefited from the expanded research in developmental studies. The research has resulted in more empirically designed programs based on the developmental levels of adolescent parents (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Armed with the recognition that adolescent fatherhood occurs when the fathers are least prepared to meet its demands, scholars and practitioners are recognizing that combating low educational attainment and high levels of unemployment during adolescence requires more attention to research during the developmental stages (Miller, 1997).

Challenging Stereotypes

Another challenge facing the adolescent father is the negative stereotypes pervasive in the literature and the greater society. The father's inability to be a mature responsible parent, while developmentally appropriate, leads society to a negative stereotype (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). The inability to meet the traditional norm of older more experienced fathers also contributes to the negative portrayals. Indeed, he has been depicted as the forgotten parent (Barret & Robinson, 1986; Rivara, 1981), stereotyped as an irresponsible parent by practitioners (Miller, 1997), disregarded by social work practitioners (Miller, 1997), and viewed as a delinquent by policymakers (Miller, 1997; Paschal, 2006). Early studies of adolescent fathers even assumed adolescent fathers were psychologically unstable (Glikman, 2004). Despite recent literature challenging the stereotypes, the myths that characterize the adolescent father remain (Nelson, 2004).

Flaws in research methods have contributed to the stereotypes attributed to adolescent fathers. Many of the articles written before 1990 cite the adolescent father as either unwilling or unavailable to participate in the studies. Citing the inaccessibility to this population, many researchers relied on the maternal parent to inform their research. Other studies relied on incarcerated African-American adolescents from low-income environments (Gavin et al., 2002). These participants, while contributing to the research, are not entirely representative of the adolescent father population (Nelson, 2004) and perpetuated the stereotype of the minority

delinquent teenager fathering multiple children without attempting to provide for them (Hernandez, 2009).

King, Harris, and Hoard's (2004) study challenged previously held stereotypes by recognizing fathers as multifaceted participants with active and nurturing roles in the parenting process. Their study is one of the few to include major racial groups (i.e., black, white, Hispanic, Asian) and to explore racial and ethnic differences in nonresident father involvement. More qualitative studies inclusive of the various racial groups are necessary to accurately portray the issues facing adolescent fathers.

Cultural differences play a major role in the stereotypes assigned to adolescent fathers because the enactment of fatherhood varies among cultures and subcultures (Gavin et al., 2002). However, researchers often compare adolescent, minority, and nonresidential fathers to white, married, middle-class fathers (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). Comparing an urban, adolescent African-American father's level of involvement with a married father is obviously going to generate different responses. Generally, the comparisons have focused on time spent in the home or the amount of financial support the father has provided (Gavin et al., 2002; Pascal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). Despite advances in cultural appreciation, deviations from the standard were considered unfavorably or undesirable.

More recent literature challenges the stereotypical characterization of the minority adolescent male as an oversexed, uninvolved, and even deviant perpetrator (Hernandez, 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2009). While minority males have been negatively branded as sexual predators, research shows that white, Hispanic, and African-American males have their first experiences at approximately the same age of 14 (Nelson, 1994; Rivara et al., 1987). Additionally, there is research suggesting no significant disparity in sexual activity based on race after the initial experience (Sullivan, 1989). However, teenagers from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups are becoming sexually active earlier and in greater numbers than those of any earlier generation.

Sexual activity starts at approximately the same age regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic group including a growing proportion of the non-minority middle class. Lacking significant discrepancies in sexual activity requires exploration beyond reliance on outdated stereotypes. Instead, the focus should not be on the number of sexual partners but on the cultural differences in the patterns of contraceptive use (Nelson, 1994). The disparities are more evident

when we consider cultural views and social enactment of abortion, birth control, paternal involvement, marriage, and cohabitation (Applegate, 1988; Sullivan, 1989).

Allen and Doherty (1996) reported that African-American adolescents have distinctly higher rates of pregnancy than their European American counterparts because of cultural values. The assumption exists that African-American and Hispanic adolescents have an ethnic predisposition or cultural preference toward early pregnancy. They also report that minority rates of sexual activity may not be higher but they are more likely to become parents because of their cultural views on abortion when compared to their white peers. Sullivan (1989) and Paschal (2006) also reported that minority adolescent parents are less likely to use abortion as an option to pregnancy.

Combating the negative stereotypes assigned to adolescent fathers requires researchers to look beyond the existing research. Presenting an accurate portrayal involves allowing adolescent fathers to provide their narrative, using appropriate research methods, and continuing to provide greater recognition of cultural diversity. The increase in research over the last 30 years has begun the process of providing a cultural context for the adolescent father as a means to challenge the negative stereotypes that limit our understanding of adolescent fathers.

An Ecological Framework for Understanding the Adolescent Father

The ecological perspective has played a major role in advancing developmental studies of fatherhood. It is a framework that is useful in providing a bridge from early fatherhood studies that have focused on child development to research inclusive of the development of the adolescent father (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Specifically, it has been vital to the transition in research that emerged from the 1970s and 1980s that focused on the mother-child relationships to include the developmental aspects of father-child relationship (Pleck, 2007).

Pleck (2007) credits the ecological framework with providing a wider lens to qualitatively record the adolescent fathers' perceptions of himself and his surroundings. Corcoran (1999) recommends the ecological perspective because of the versatility it offers researchers and practitioners. It has the ability to inform researchers on various levels, including familial, neighborhood, and cultural conditions that impact the individual's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Pleck, 2007). Focusing on specific levels of the ecological framework allows practitioners the opportunity to provide interventions based on the appropriate level (Corcoran, 1999).

This ability to view the adolescent father from various levels is valuable to researchers working within the field of adolescent parenting. Specifically, this framework provides a lens to study adolescent fathers' perceptions of their experiences within social and cultural contexts. This model has proven effective when considering the complex environmental relationship that exists between the adolescent father and his family, community, and other societal structures such as the policies and laws that directly and indirectly affect his life (Gavin et al., 2002; Paschal, 2006). This includes the social policies, socioeconomic conditions, and employment opportunities that collectively and individually affect the inhabitants of a neighborhood (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002).

The problems associated with adolescent pregnancy are not created in a vacuum; the factors that contribute to the high rate of adolescent births in the United States extend beyond the individual adolescent mother or father. They are the bi-product of individual choices, family influences, peer pressure, cultural and historical factors, and government policies. To understand how these internal and external factors contribute to the phenomenon of adolescent fatherhood, researchers support using an ecological framework (Paschal, 2006; Sullivan 1989). This perspective provides researchers with a view of the relationship between the developing human being and the settings and contexts in which the person is actively involved (Kazak, 1986).

Urie Brofenbrenner (1986) played a key role in expanding the framework of the ecological perspective. His ecological framework added layers and perspectives to view environmental and cultural factors. It focused on father-child development, while also including the influence of family members, community and culture. Brofenbrenner outlined four levels of environmental systems to view the multiple factors that influence the individual, namely micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems (see Table 2.4) .

Table 2.4***Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1986)***

System	Environmental and Cultural Factors
Micro-system	Family; father's relationship with child; father's relationship with maternal parent
Meso-system	Father's relationship with church, school system, maternal grandparents
Exo-system	Economic or political institutions; father's link to community resources, employment, education
Macro-system	Environment; ideological values, norms, culture; family traditions and values that inform father on his role and established norms for parenting behaviors

Within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, the family is the individual's primary microsystem in which development occurs. The adolescent father's relationship with his child provides a dyadic example of a microsystem (Paschal, 2006). Connected to that relationship is the type of relationship he has with the child's maternal parent. This aspect is an important component of the microsystem because it is one of the primary predictors of continuing paternal involvement. Studies indicate that adolescent fathers romantically connected to the maternal parent remain involved in the life of the child (Gavin et al., 2002).

According to Berk (2000), linking one micro-system to another microsystem creates a meso-system. An adolescent father's relationship with another structure in the community, including the church and school system, exemplifies a meso-system. The father's relationship with the maternal grandparents is an important meso-system that often influences his level of involvement. The adolescent father withdraws if there is resentment from the maternal parents family (Paschal, 2006). Depending on his developmental level, the adolescent father may not have the capacity to negotiate through these adversarial relationships and often withdraws when faced with such adversity (Miller, 1997; Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989).

The exo-system consists of the broader institutions, such as economic or political institutions, that indirectly affect the father's microsystems (Erkut, Szalacha, & Coll, 2005; Paschal, 2006). Corcoran's (1999) review of the ecological perspective described the exo-system as the layer that the individual does not interact with directly. These seen or unseen external forces influence the adolescent father's involvement with his child (Berk, 2000; Paschal, 2006). A more direct link in the father's exo-system is through community resources,

employment, and educational opportunities that affect his level of involvement. Historically, community and agency programs have provided services for adolescent mothers with little attention given to the paternal parent, leaving him isolated from the parenting process (Paschal, 2006). Sullivan's (1989) study of three diverse neighborhoods illustrated the value in community resources. The neighborhood with more resources, services, and programs for adolescent parents had lower teen pregnancy rates.

The macro-system is the external and generally unseen layer of the individual's environment. Both Paschal (2006) and Berk (2000) cite the macro-system as the holder of the larger ideological values, norms, and culture in which the other systems occur. The macro-system informs the adolescent father on his role and establishes norms on enacting parenting behavior. The enactment of cultural values occurs at the macro level. Researchers recognize that adolescent fathers enact culture by adapting family traditions and values from their parents and other influential adult family and community members.

Each layer of the ecological framework shapes the adolescent father's paternal behaviors, beliefs, and level of involvement (Johnson, 2001; Miller 1994). Using this framework helps to address the concerns that had been raised previously related to (a) more accurate measures of the father's involvement in parenting, (b) recognize the adolescent developmentally, and (c) challenge stereotypes of the adolescent father. The framework has been utilized by researchers to analyze individual and environmental factors that encompass all aspects of the adolescent father's life (Stokols, 1996). The broadening of the researcher's lens to include environmental factors makes it an effective tool to analyze the phenomenon of adolescent fatherhood. This lens allows researchers to look beyond the individual determinants to internal and external environmental factors that contribute to early parenthood (Paschal, 2006; Pleck, 2007). This approach also provides the framework to analyze the factors that contribute to adolescent males becoming parents and to recognize the influences of his family, community, and society.

The Ecological Framework and the Adolescent Father

Bronfenbrenner structured the ecological perspective to explore the micro-system represented by the father-child relationship yet flexible enough to consider the effects social policies, such as welfare, have on a community (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Sullivan, 1989). Each layer of the system, whether seen or unseen, affects the father and his level of involvement with his child. This includes the relationship he has with his child and the maternal parent. The reach

extends to the support he receives from his family, friends, and the maternal parents relatives. The resources, from employment opportunities to parenting classes, within his community and extending out to surrounding neighborhoods within his city and state, also affect his ability to adjust to his new life role. While often unseen by the individual, local, state, and federal policies affect the adolescent father's ability to remain an active, involved parent (Erkut, Szalach, & Coll, 2005).

The ecological framework has been used in a variety of studies to examine the lives of adolescent fathers (see Table 2.5). Qualitative studies of low-income African-American or Hispanic males living in urban environments are prominent. Theoretical frameworks have included ecological, symbolic interactionism, and feminist. The use of an ecological framework is appropriate for the study of adolescent fathers because it provides a holistic view of the adolescent father that is inclusive of his culture, gender, family structure, and external environmental forces. Researchers have used this perspective to identify the personal characteristics of the participants while including the dynamics of the family structure that contribute to the adolescent becoming a parent (Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). It also includes community and neighborhood influences and delves into the unseen socio-cultural forces that contribute to the enactment of parental involvement (Franklin, 1988).

Governmental policies often have unintended consequences for fathers, and research can influence change. The rule that prohibits having the father from living in a home if the mother receives governmental assistance has been under scrutiny. Policy-makers are recognizing that these rules are producing large concentrations of female-headed single-family households. The policy has created communities where the fathers may live in the neighborhood but are not providing the type of support and involvement necessary. These unintended consequences have caused some states to eliminate these policies (Sullivan, 1989).

Table 2.5
Ecological Studies Using Adolescent Fathers

Author (Year)	Sample Size	Type of Study	Theories	Setting
Sullivan (1989)	N=48 African-American (n=16) Hispanic (n=17) Caucasian (n=15)	Qualitative	Ecological	Urban
Allen & Doherty (1996)	N=10 African American	Qualitative	Symbolic Interactionism Ecological	Urban
Thornberry, Smith, & Howard (1997)	N=615 White (n=121) African American (n=386) Hispanic (n=108)	Quantitative	Ecological	Urban
Gavin et al. (2002)	N=181 African-American females	Quantitative	Ecological	Urban
Bunting & MacAuley (2004)	N=20 Irish mothers (n=16) Irish fathers (n=4)	Qualitative		Urban
Paschal (2006)	N=30 African- American adolescent males	Qualitative	Ecological Feminist	Urban
Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana (2009)	N=115 African-American & Hispanic	Qualitative	Ecological Symbolic Interactionism	Urban
Dornig et al. (2009)	N=90 Hispanic (n=72) African-American (n=9) Biracial (n=6) Other (n=3)	Qualitative	Not stated	Urban

Perhaps Sullivan's (1989) study best exemplifies the range of the ecology framework. His research provided insight into adolescent pregnancy, father involvement, and employment using the ecological framework. His exploration of three ethnically diverse neighborhoods in New York City (i.e., African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian) demonstrated the interconnected influence of structural economic factors, culture, and social ecology in shaping processes of family and household formation (Paschal, 2006).

Sullivan's (1989) research provided insight into cultural differences in adolescent pregnancy, father involvement, and adaptation to neighborhood resources. His qualitative study

focusing on adolescent fathers of a similar age and socioeconomic level provided an opportunity to compare the ways individual and cultural groups respond to high unemployment, sexual beliefs, and parenting. Specifically, the different views on abortion, marriage, and co-residence illustrated the power of familial, cultural, and structural factors for some groups. His qualitative study focusing on adolescent fathers of a similar age and circumstance provided an opportunity to compare the ways individual and cultural groups respond to high unemployment, sexual beliefs, and parenting.

Sullivan's (1989) work also broadened the scope of ecological research by placing contextual emphasis on environmental systems providing researchers and policy makers the lens to look at the distinctive aspects of each neighborhood. Specifically, the different views on abortion, marriage, and co-residence illustrate the power of familial, cultural, and structural factors. Sullivan's study highlighted the unique range of responses to early pregnancy in each neighborhood. The impact of resources, or lack thereof, available within the community was colluded with the familial responses to adolescent pregnancy.

Sullivan (1989) recognized that the familial and cultural decision not to pursue marriage extends beyond the microsystem and meso-system. While, the Hispanic fathers were more likely to pursue marriage and co-residence, marriage rates were lowest within the African American community. He attributed the lower marriage rates among African-American adolescent parents to external factors relating to social policies and poverty found in many inner-city environments.

Allen and Doherty (1996) explored the perceptions of adolescent fathers and the meanings of adolescent fatherhood in their qualitative study of ten adolescent African American fathers. Using in-depth interviews to allow the fathers to express their views on father involvement and the impact of their own relationship with their fathers, the researchers explored the motivations and aspirations of the participants. The results indicated that the perception of fatherhood plays a major role in the development of adolescent father's paternal behavior. The adolescent fathers consistently cited ethnic and familial socialization as sources for their own paternal idealization, including their own father, other male relatives, and other male role models in the community. If there were no significant male present, the participants reached for famous males from sports and entertainment for role models (Allen & Doherty, 1996). This symbolizes a common theme from the literature: fathers recognize what a *good father* looks like and desire to emulate those characteristics (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Summers et al., 2006).

Thornberry, Smith, and Howard (1997) explored early risk factors that lead to adolescent males becoming fathers. Thornberry and associates used data from the Rochester Youth Development study, an ongoing study of teenagers, to ascertain the prevalence of adolescent fatherhood in a sample of 615 adolescent men and their families. One of the goals of their quantitative study was to discover antecedent characteristics of adolescent fathers. While there is no single risk factor, results indicate that being a racial or ethnic minority, demonstrating deviant behaviors, and coming from a structurally disadvantaged home increased the risk of being an adolescent parent. However, a limitation of this study was an oversampling of males from high crime areas of the city as these participants were more likely to engage in criminal activities and antisocial behaviors. This study highlights the need for social science researchers to include culturally diverse populations in future studies. To counter the negative stereotypes typically attributed to adolescent fathers, researchers are encouraged to include larger ecological issues surrounding adolescent parenting.

Gavin et al. (2002) used the ecological perspective with quantitative methodology to explore adolescent paternal involvement. He used first-time mothers, fathers, and the maternal grandmother to measure paternal involvement. While quantitative in nature, this study is of interest because of the inclusion of the maternal grandmother. This is important since the adolescent father's relationship with her is a predictor in his level of involvement. Indeed, these researchers found that the maternal grandmother acted as a gatekeeper. The adolescent father's involvement was influenced by his relationship with the maternal grandmother. Interestingly, maternal grandmothers with higher levels of education reported higher levels of satisfaction in their relationship with the adolescent father.

Bunting and MacAuley (2004) examined the factors that affected adolescents becoming fathers and described how the respective factors influenced the level of involvement. Although based in the United Kingdom, their literature included studies from the United States because of the lack of attention focused on the issue in their home country. Interestingly, the authors found results similar to those in the States regarding the expectations of both parents. A qualitative study in Northern Ireland involving 16 adolescent mothers and four fathers found that the maternal parent was more concerned with the nurturing aspects of parenting as opposed to the financial support. These researchers demonstrated that the pattern of lower socioeconomic

parents having higher rates of adolescent births in Ireland is similar to findings in the United States. These findings align with qualitative work of Sullivan (1989) and Paschal (2006).

Paschal's (2006) exploratory study of 30 African-American adolescent fathers used social ecology and gender theory to analyze the subjective meanings of fatherhood for the participants. She found that most of the adolescent father's described responsible fathering in the traditional form of family provider. The participants were also cognizant of the effects of racism and the environmental restrictions imposed by living in neighborhoods with few resources. However, the fathers spoke about their hope for the next generation and expressed a desire to make a better life for their children.

Paschal (2006) noted that a few of the fathers were aware of macro-social factors that had negative effects on their neighborhood. She summarized them as challenges associated with racism, neighborhood segregation, and poverty. These factors contribute to fewer employment opportunities, higher jobless rates, and lower options for employment growth (Wilson, 2009). Communities with greater resources were able to provide the adolescent father with employment opportunities. Sullivan (1989) noted that the Caucasian participants in his study benefited from higher rates of home and business ownership within the immediate community. While the African-American and Hispanic participants often faltered in attempts to pursue employment opportunities outside of their neighborhoods, leading to higher levels of unemployment. The participants in Paschal's (2006) study described the provider as their primary role. Being unable to provide financial support often challenges their image of manhood. Sullivan (1989) recognized that the familial and cultural decision not to pursue marriage extends beyond the micro-system and mesosystem. While the Hispanic fathers were more likely to pursue marriage and co-residence, marriage rates were lowest within the African American community. He attributed the lower marriage rates among African-American adolescent parents to external factors relating to social policies and poverty found in many inner-city environments. As evidence of their interrelatedness, Paschal (2006) noted how these factors contribute lower rates of marriage in poor communities and that "poverty creates conditions in which men do not see marital formation or nuclear family formations as advantageous" (p.35).

Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, and Khurana (2009) studied 115 young, minority, low-income, and criminally involved fathers. The researchers used phenomenological analysis to explore the meanings of fatherhood for the participants, along with their involvement with their

offspring. They also used the ecological perspective to frame the influence of environmental factors. Found that the enactment of fatherhood and continued involvement is influenced by developmental factors, the ability to contribute financially, along with peer and family support. Perhaps the most telling aspect of this study was that the adolescent fathers expressed views similar to middle age adults on the ideals of fatherhood. Yet, they were limited by their own developmental level, financial restraints, and lack of family support. These factors often inhibited the adolescent fathers from enacting their vision of fatherhood. The researchers concluded that, despite the participants' idealized view of fatherhood, enactment remains difficult without structured social support services to assist this population.

The analysis by Dornig et al. (2009) highlighted the desire of adolescent fathers to be involved parents. The themes generated included "growing up" and "expectations and pressure" illustrating the developmental limitations and yet awareness of societal expectations. The narratives also indicated a generative focus on the future as the fathers hoped for a "better life" (p.56) and recognized the need for "cooperation, togetherness, and bonding" (p.55).

The themes that affect the father's level of involvement are evident across the studies reviewed (see Table 2.6). Each reports the influence of the father's relationship with his child's mother, his ability to contribute financially, social influences, and familial support. These studies provide evidence for the utility in using an ecological framework to view each of these respective factors in relation to the adolescent father. These studies on adolescent fatherhood further challenge the negative stereotypes assigned to him. While there are adolescent fathers who are absent, the majority desires active involvement and active participation in raising their offspring. Even those low-income fathers with criminal backgrounds expressed a willingness to remain involved in their child's life. However, the literature illustrates the barriers to their involvement that range from their own development to their relationship with the maternal parent, which hinder their continued involvement.

The limitation of these studies is participant selection. The continued and almost exclusive use of urban, minority adolescent parents reinforces the stereotype that restricts this phenomenon to a specific group and geographic location. While the rate of adolescent parenthood is higher among African-Americans (Paschal, 2006), it should not exclude researchers from studying other ethnic groups.

Table 2.6***Summary of Findings from Research on Adolescent Fathers***

Study	Summary of Findings
Sullivan (1989)	Fathers in neighborhoods with more resources were more financially able to support their children and exhibited greater levels of involvement.
Allen & Doherty (1996)	The adolescent father's perception of fatherhood plays a major role in the development of his paternal behavior. Perceptions deriving from their own paternal idealization and other male role models in their lives.
Thornberry, Smith, & Howard (1997)	Explored early risk factors that may lead to adolescent males becoming fathers. While there is no single risk factor, results indicate that being a racial or ethnic minority, demonstrating deviant behaviors, and coming from a structurally disadvantaged home increased the risk of being an adolescent parent
Gavin et al. (2002)	The maternal grandmother is an influential force in the adolescent father's involvement. Her acceptance of the father is noted as a factor in his level of involvement.
Bunting & MacAuley (2004)	Adolescent fathers have a strong desire to be involved in their child's life and have a generative approach to fatherhood in expressing a desire for their offspring (a) to have a better life than they had and (b) to be better parents than their fathers.
Paschal (2006)	Adolescent fathers described responsible fathering in the traditional form of family provider but also wanted to be actively involved in their child's life.
Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana (2009)	Adolescent fathers express conceptualizations of fatherhood similar to middle class fathers but have less chance of enacting them due to developmental and environmental influences.
Dornig et al. (2009)	Adolescent fathers desire to be involved parents, similar to middle age fathers, reflective of the generative perspective, despite their inability to fully enact them. Themes included "growing up" and "expectations and pressure" illustrating their developmental limitations and yet awareness of societal expectations.

These studies have provided the adolescent father's perspective on the conceptualization and enactment of fatherhood. Each of these qualitative works seeks a reflective response posed, in various forms, to the question "what does fatherhood mean to you?" Previous studies related to adolescent fathers yield consistent patterns and trends in the findings and refute many of the negative stereotypes attached to adolescent fathers (see Table 2.6). The majority of adolescent fathers wants to provide financial support, wants to be involved in the daily care of their

offspring, and is concerned about his child's future (i.e., generative perspective). This generative focus has existed within most of the research participants, including those criminally involved (Wilkinson et al., 2009). These findings inform us that, while the adolescent father expresses a strong desire to be an active participant, he is hindered by his own developmental level, limited employment options, truncated education, and relationship issues with the maternal parent and grandparent.

As identified in Table 2.6, Thornberry et al. (1997) found an accumulation of risk factors may lead to adolescent fatherhood. For example, African-American and Hispanic adolescent males have higher rates of fatherhood than their Caucasian peers. In addition, participation in activities such as drug use, violent behavior, early sexual involvement, were potential indicators of adolescent fatherhood. Adolescents whose parents were also adolescent parents have higher risk of repeating the pattern.

However, there is no single indicator that leads to an adolescent male to become a parent at an early age. When the risk factors are cumulative, there is a higher likelihood he will also engage in risky behavior (i.e., early sexual activity) that leads to adolescent fatherhood. The continuation of these negative behaviors after the birth of the child, combined with limited education and employment opportunities become barriers to the adolescent father enacting his vision of fatherhood.

Qualitative research on adolescent fatherhood has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. However, the majority of qualitative studies (see Table 2.5), use participants from lower socioeconomic, inner-city environments. There exists a need to explore the lived experience of adolescent father's from suburban, culturally diverse communities.

Constructivist Approach and the Adolescent Father

The ecological perspective informs us that adolescent parenting is more than a biological process. It involves internal and external factors that contribute to young men becoming fathers. While the ecological perspective provides a holistic accounting of the adolescent father's environment, it does not provide his narrative. The majority of adolescent parenting literature focuses on the adolescent mother while literature examining the adolescent fathers' perceptions and enactments of fatherhood remains limited (Hernandez, 2002; Paschal, 2006). Without this perspective, community, academic, and social policies are severely limited. Adolescent parenting does not occur in a vacuum; additional research examining the adolescent father's

construction of fatherhood is necessary (Wilkinson et al., 2009). This is vital to developing an understanding of fatherhood; how adolescent fathers construct fatherhood and how environmental influences affect their role participation (Hernandez, 2002; Wilkinson et al., 2009).

Constructivism recognizes the influence of environmental forces as part of the individual's subjective reality. It highlights the reciprocal relationship that exists between the individual and his environment in which the individual influences and is influenced by his environment (Furman, Jackson, Downey, & Shears, 2003). However, constructivism goes beyond accounting for the individual's social environment. Similar to the ecological perspective's meso-system, constructivism incorporates the social network by recognizing that peers and family are important to the individual's construction of reality (Furman et al., 2003). These interactions assist the individual in formulating his reality and provide insight into how he interprets his experiences.

A constructivist view also purports that there is no single reality explaining an individual's perspective. Just as there are multiple explanations for the adolescent fatherhood phenomenon, there also exist multiple perspectives within each individual (Creswell, 2007). A constructivist approach recognizes that each individual develops a subjective approach based on his or her experiences. The researcher co-creates these multiple realities with the participant through a reconstruction of their lived experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Constructivism is an appropriate approach for research relating to the adolescent father because it provides the framework to analyze the subjective meanings individuals create. Seidman recommends using phenomenological measures to reconstruct experiences and put them in context. Specifically, he recommends using in-depth, open-ended questioning so that the individual's "behaviors become meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (Seidman, 2006, p. 16).

Using a constructivist approach in qualitative study has proven to be an effective tool for capturing the narratives of marginalized populations (Creswell, 2007). This framework garners the unique perspective of the adolescent father. While the ecological perspective provides the framework to view the structural and cultural influences, the constructivist approach provides context to describe how adolescent fathers process their environmental influences and how these influence his perception of fatherhood (Hernandez, 2002).

Summary

The adolescent father faces many challenges as he traverses adolescence and fatherhood while negotiating the negative stereotypes with limited resources. Obstacles to adolescent fathers' involvement include their developmental limitations, romantic involvement with the maternal parent, and relationship with maternal grandmother, and socioeconomic and ecological factors. Despite these challenges, many adolescent fathers are actively involved in raising their children (Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). A better understanding of this involvement (i.e., engagement, accessibility, responsibility) beyond measuring time spent is needed.

Researchers are called on to explore the individual, familial, and external factors that influence the perceptions of and level of enactment for adolescent fathers. Qualitative approaches, such as those of Paschal (2006) and Sullivan (1989), using an ecological framework to illustrate the interplay of systems (i.e., micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-) combined with a constructivist lens to provide context to often misunderstood behaviors of the adolescent father. These approaches allow researchers to view adolescent fatherhood holistically through a generative lens.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

A review of the literature shows an increase in research relating to adolescent fathers' perceptions of fatherhood; however, it still pales in comparison to adolescent mothers (Paschal, 2006). The need to better understand adolescent fathers remains an underdeveloped component in fatherhood research (Paschal, 2006). This study adds to the literature by using a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of adolescent fathers from diverse racial groups to include African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian participants.

This study provided adolescent fathers a safe, inviting platform from which to narrate and construct their story. The research questions focus on the adolescent father's lived experiences by capturing the essence of the participant's view of and behaviors as a father. The semi-structured question format sought to explore the adolescent father's life before becoming a father, his current fatherhood experiences, and his personal reflection of fatherhood. The research questions that guided the study included the following:

How would you describe your life before becoming a father?

As a father, what are your current experiences with your child?

In your own words, how do you describe what it means to be a father?

Research Design

A qualitative design was the most appropriate for a subject as intimate as fatherhood, particularly for a group rarely asked how its members conceptualize fatherhood. Marginalized populations, such as the adolescent father whose narrated experiences and social contexts have been largely excluded from research, are particularly appropriate for qualitative study (Dornig et al., 2006). Qualitative studies have proven beneficial in providing a voice to populations operating outside of the mainstream and ignored by society (Glickman, 2004).

This study used a phenomenology approach to explore the adolescent father's experiences and the meanings he attached to fatherhood. The aim of this study was to identify and describe the subjective experiences of participants as they conceptualized and enacted their role as a father. Similar to Sullivan's (1989) study of adolescent fathers in New York, purposeful sampling was used in selecting participants for the study who represent diverse racial

groups (Sullivan, 1989). Interview questions were framed through a constructivist lens to gather data on the contextual and socially constructed experiences of the participants.

Much of the earlier research related to adolescent fathers focused on participants from the inner city, low-income, and incarcerated youth (Sullivan, 1989). To broaden the perspective, participants for this study included adolescent fathers from diverse racial groups, including African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian, who live in suburban environments. The design of this study addressed limitations found in prior research that compared married, middle class white fathers with the fatherhood experiences of adolescent fathers. Additionally, the constructivist lens focused on rich descriptions in the participant's own words, which is a perspective lacking in many of the earlier studies that relied on the adolescent mother's opinion or the adult father's conceptualization (Paschal, 2006).

The framework and accompanying tools inherent within qualitative methodology proved valuable in this exploration of the adolescent father's life. This exploration ranged from how he remains involved in his child's life to how he conceptualized himself as a father. These methods, particularly the open-ended questioning, helped describe how the adolescent father's level of involvement matches his conceptualization of fatherhood. When the participant's feedback was not consistent, then I explored the barriers that keep him from being the father he envisions.

Role of the Researcher

I am a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I have also been a high school counselor for 13 years where I have been exposed to approximately 20 adolescent fathers. It was my experience with these former students that sparked my interest in this topic. One student in particular stands out. He dropped out of school and began working in construction to support his girlfriend and child. While there were programs within the school for adolescent mothers, no assistance or accommodations were provided for adolescent fathers.

Additionally, I was curious about the differences between adolescent fathers and adult fathers. As a father of three adolescent males, I recognize the challenges parents face. I can not help but consider how they would respond if placed in similar situations as these participants. Additionally, becoming a father at the age of 22 and a recent college graduate, I was both concerned that I did not have the tools necessary to be a father and excited about the prospect of guiding, nurturing, and being responsible for another human being.

My doctoral program informed me about the larger issues facing this population. During my doctoral internship, I helped develop a program called the Fatherhood Initiative. This program was designed to provide leadership training to teen fathers and to help them gain the necessary skills to become responsible parents. The research I compiled for the Fatherhood Initiative mirrored the literature review for this dissertation. As a result, the focus of the program addressed issues relating to personal development, responsible fatherhood, educational advancement, employment skills, relationship issues, and life skill development.

Although I had associates who became fathers in high school, I did not have an understanding of the adolescent father's life. Since they were not close friends, I was not aware of the impact fatherhood had on them. Before interviewing the research participants, the majority of my knowledge about this population came from the existing literature. As a result, I was more cognizant of being influenced by the prior research than from my own experiences with this population.

The recognition that this population continues to be ignored by the educational system and community agencies leads to this project and the desire to learn more about the life experiences of this population. To ensure that my curiosity and prior knowledge did not unduly influence this research, I relied on my experience as a counselor, use of phenomenological procedures to remain reflexive, and bracketed my personal feelings for the duration of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological theory and a constructivist perspective provided the framework to view the conceptualization and enactment of adolescent fatherhood from the participant's subjective point of view. The ecological and constructivist perspectives were crucial in providing a holistic view of the adolescent father's perspective and his construction of fatherhood. The theoretical framework also assisted me in remaining non-judgmental so that I was open to the analysis process in exploring the meanings and context of the adolescent fathers (Seidman, 2006).

Specifically, the ecological perspective provided a framework for the internal and external factors that impacted the adolescent father's behavior (Seidman, 2006). The ecological perspective provided context to the environmental influences related to the adolescent father's micro-system, meso-system, exo-system, and macro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Studies by Paschal (2006) and Sullivan (1989) used the ecological perspective to frame the adolescent father's prior experiences and the meaning attached to those experiences in their respective

studies on adolescent fathers. Specifically, both authors used the ecological framework to address the individual, familial, and sociological implications of adolescent fatherhood.

A constructivist perspective provided the subjective understanding, meanings, and context of the adolescent father's thought processes, as he understands the world in which he lives (Creswell, 2007). It leads the researcher to look for the complexity of the participant's views, the father's actions, and how he defined those actions (Seidman, 2006). These views are formed through interactions with others and norms as understood by the individual. In this study, a constructivist perspective guided the development of broad and general interview questions so that participants constructed their meanings of adolescent fatherhood. Using these principles, participants constructed and described their personal feelings about and behaviors associated with fatherhood. While I was using the aforementioned theories, efforts were made to eliminate framing the participant's answers and my subsequent analysis to fit a specific theoretical lens (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

The combination of the ecological and constructivist perspectives provided a holistic framework to view the adolescent father. A holistic framework allowed for the exploration of how adolescent fathers perceived fatherhood, their environmental influences, and how they constructed the meaning of fatherhood. Additionally, the ecological and constructivist perspectives accounted for structural and cultural influences and how those influences affected the adolescent's experiences as a father (Hernandez, 2002).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology was most suitable when trying to understand individuals through the meanings they attached to their lived experiences (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999; Seidman, 2006). Phenomenology supported the use of open-ended questions and in-depth interview procedures to allow participants to speak freely about their lived experiences. As suggested by Creswell (2007), using open-ended questions through in-depth interviewing contributed to a greater understanding of the historical and cultural experiences of this population. Using in-depth interviewing provided a wealth of data necessary to better understand the participants' perceptions and experiences as adolescent fathers (Seidman, 2006). The accumulation of data proved beneficial in deciphering the essence of those lived experiences.

Specifically, I utilized transcendental phenomenology to assist in providing rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the research participants (Groenewald, 2004). In the

tradition of Moustakas, this approach used bracketing to assist in putting aside preconceived perspectives about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). As previously addressed in the literature review, negative stereotyping has helped to marginalize this population. Therefore, it was important that I bracketed subjective feelings regarding the participants' experiences.

The transcendental approach also proved helpful in the data analysis procedures. I incorporated aspects of Colaizzi's (1978) approach to data analysis. As illustrated in Creswell (2007), after bracketing my experiences and collecting data from the participants via in-depth interviews, I analyzed the data to uncover significant themes and to develop textural and structural descriptions. The textural and structural descriptions assisted in summarization of the essence of the participants' lived experiences.

Participants

The target area for the study was Manassas City, Virginia, which is a suburban area in Northern Virginia. As I anticipated, the challenge for this project was greater than those who studied adolescent fathers located in more concentrated, inner city areas (e.g., Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). To identify potential participants, I relied on my relationships with the local school in Manassas City. As the study proceeded, I took advantage of snowball sampling by asking participants if they knew of other adolescent fathers in similar circumstances (Creswell, 2007). This yielded one additional participant. I also used the Participant Recruitment Letter (Appendix F) to identify myself and provide an overview of my study to potential participants, community agency personnel, and school officials.

Selection Criteria

Purposeful sampling was used in this phenomenological study, given the marginalized population, intended purpose of the research, and age requirements necessary for participation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Groenewald, 2004). For the purposes of this study, an adolescent father was a male, biological parent between the ages of 13-19 years. Participants must have become fathers prior to their 19th birthday and be 20 or younger at the time of interview (Tuffin et al., 2010). Additionally, the father must be actively involved with his child for consideration in this study. At a minimum, actively involved consists of having contact with the child on a monthly basis. I utilized the Participant Demographic Questionnaire to ascertain whether potential participants met the established criteria (Appendix E).

Procedures

Institutional Review Board

I adhered to all policies for conducting research. I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the university before I began my research project. Permission from the local school district was also secured before any contact with potential participants, and I adhered to their policies for conducting research. The informed consent form for adult participants (Appendix A) or the informed assent form for minor participants (Appendix B) and their parent or guardian (Appendix C) was completed prior to any interview. These forms explained the purpose of the study and provided details regarding the participant's involvement. Before the date of the interview and to ensure ethical research protocol, each participant signed either the informed consent (i.e., adult participant) or an assent form (i.e., minor participant) acknowledging and agreeing to the following:

- recognizes that participation in the study is voluntary
- understands the purpose of the research
- understands the procedures of the research
- understands the risks and benefits of his participation
- understands he can halt participation at any time
- understands the procedures used to protect confidentiality
- understands his responses will be recorded

Data Collection Methods

The focus of this study was to explore how the adolescent father experiences fatherhood. A qualitative methods framework allowed the adolescent father to reconstruct his experiences and personal reflections (Seidman, 2006). I used participant interviews as the primary method of data collection for this study. The research questions and interview protocol guided this study, however, the study evolved based on the participants and their descriptions of the adolescent fatherhood phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004).

Data was gathered using field notes and an audio recorder. In accordance with the IRB policies, written consent to audio record interviews was obtained from the participants and their parents, if they are minors. The use of an audio recorder captured the interview and ensured the participant's narrative was accurate. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The field

notes were useful in documenting immediate thoughts and reflections after each interview. This process was explained to each participant prior to the interview.

Field Notes

I used dated ‘memoing’ or field notes to reflect the participant's experiences. Memoing also proved useful by allowing me to reflect my feelings, thoughts and experiences from each interview. Using dated field notes was beneficial in correlating the memos with the recorded data from the interviews (Groenewald, 2004). Additionally, the field notes served as the primary step in the analysis of the data. However, I was cognizant to not allow the initial review of field notes to guide the analysis. Instead, the field notes were supplemental to the data analysis (Groenewald, 2004).

To organize and assist in the data collection and preliminary analysis of my field notes, I used an adaptation of the initial coding developed by Schatzman and Strauss (Hughes, 1994). I also included structural and textural descriptions (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006). The coding protocol (see Table 3.1) was particularly useful in identifying and denoting the adolescent father’s exploration and description of the meanings he attached to fatherhood.

Table 3.1

Coding Protocol

Type of Note	Abbreviation	Purpose
Observational notes	ON	Based on observations including but not limited to the interview.
Theoretical notes	TN	Reflections that attempt to find meaning from experiences.
Analytical memos	AM	Summary or progress reviews.
Methodological notes	MN	Self-evaluations, instructions, or prompts related to the process.
Structural description	SD	Report how the individual experiences the phenomenon.
Textural description	TXD	Report what was experienced.

Data Storage

In recognition of the disclosure of sensitive information, meticulous effort were put in place protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Krathwohl & Smith, 2005; Rich & Ginsburg, 1999). Confidentiality was addressed with the participants

through the informed consent process. Data storage materials that included audio recordings, field notes, interview transcripts, and field notes were stored electronically on a password-protected computer. Until this research project is completed, I encrypted the following information on a password-protected computer:

- signed informed consent agreement.
- notes made during the interview.
- field notes following each interview.
- any additional information gathered during the interview.
- transcription of the interviews.
- notes from the data analysis process.
- drafts and analyses of the interview reviewed with the participants for validation.
- any additional communication between the participant and myself.

This information was stored on a hard drive and secured in a locked cabinet when not in use. To protect their identity, each participant chose a pseudonym. The participant's identity, and other identifying information, was encrypted on a password-protected computer separate from the other data. Hardcopy data, including field notes, was masked using pseudonyms, to protect the anonymity of the participant. Additionally, all coding keys with identifiable information was secured separately from the coded data on a hard drive and held in a separate locked filing cabinet. In addition to encryption and password protection, I installed the most current virus protection and firewall protection to assist in preventing unauthorized access to participant information. Data collected from this study will be maintained in the manner described for three years after the completion of this project.

Interview Process

In accordance with the phenomenological framework, this study used in-depth, one-on-one interviews to provide the forum for the participants to construct their narrative (Seidman, 2006). An open-ended format was used to allow the adolescent father to fully describe his experiences and the meanings he attached to them. Similar to Paschal's (2006) study of African-American adolescent fathers, the open-ended format was useful in allowing for clarification and further exploration of questions that arise during the interview.

Paschal (2006) used various locations to accommodate participants including the adolescent father's home, community based facility, and a church. She observed no noticeable

difference in the responses given during the interviews. This study utilized similar settings to accommodate study participants including the local school, the participant's home and community-based facilities, as long as they offered the confidentiality necessary to protect the participants.

Phenomenological study does not require a specific number of participants. The total number of adolescent fathers interviewed was established once saturation was met and no new or additional information was presented (Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Seidman, 2006). Specifically, nine participants were interviewed for this study. Participants were interviewed in "rounds" with three individuals in each round. This entailed interviewing three participants, transcribing the interviews, and reviewing the transcription and field notes. This method allowed me to look for common themes before pursuing another "round" of three different participants. This also provided opportunities for reflection and to adjust my questions and compare the results from each round of interviews. This process was repeated until the information was saturated and no new information was uncovered (Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004).

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol provided structure to the interview process. It was not used as a script to be followed but as a guide to help ensure the focus of the study addresses the central themes from the research questions. Participant responses helped determine whether each specific question on the interview protocol was asked or needed further exploration (Seidman, 2006).

The interview protocol (Appendix D) used in this study was an adaptation of Seidman's (2006) three-interview format. Seidman's philosophical approach is consistent with the ecological and constructivist perspective used in this study. The technique provides a structure to explore the meaning individuals attach to their lives within the context of their experiences.

Seidman's traditional three-interview approach consists of three distinct interviews, each separated by days or even one week. The first interview captures the participant's life history. This interview segment provides an overview of the adolescent father's life history before fatherhood. The second interview captures the participant's current experiences leading up to participation in the study. This segment of the interview pursues details relating to the enactment of fatherhood. The third segment provides a reflection on what fatherhood means to the individual (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Seidman, 2006). The third segment pursues the adolescent

father's conceptualization of himself as a father. It builds on the first two segments. It also recognizes that the individual derives meaning from his past experiences, which includes environmental factors, to define his current situation (Seidman, 2006). More important, it provides a forum for the adolescent father to provide a thoughtful reflection on his experiences as a father and the meaning he attaches to those experiences.

For the purposes of the current study, the three interview segments was completed in one interview session. Prior researchers have raised concerns about the adolescent father's willingness to participate in interviews and his availability on a consistent basis (Futris et al., 2010; Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). Because of this prior research, I was able to capture the essence of the adolescent father's experience in one interview. While this time frame departs from Seidman's approach, I do not believe it influenced the results. Although Seidman suggested extending the three interviews over a two or three-week period, he recognized that adaptations are a necessary component in human research studies. Seidman noted that he has also modified the three interview series to a one-day interview with no adverse effects to the process or its results (Seidman, 2006).

Seidman (2006) expressed concern that the context of the "one-shot" interview may affect the interviewer's ability to adequately explore context. However, using multiple forms of data collection and analysis addressed the concerns surrounding the trustworthiness associated with the one-time interview. Additionally, although there were alterations to the structure, using Seidman's approach improved the study's validity. Each segment of the interview protocol allowed the participant to reflect on his prior response and adjust or alter his response (Seidman, 2006).

Phenomenological Data Analysis

Data analysis in a phenomenological study includes managing, reading and memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, and representing the data (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) and Colaizzi (1978) were the primary influences for the data analysis in this study. Creswell's approach to phenomenological research involves pursuing the essence or meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2007). As a supplement to Creswell's approach, I incorporated aspects of Colaizzi's approach to data analysis to assist in structuring the collection and analysis of the participant's responses. This included developing a table of significant statements and a table of meaningful themes to assist in developing a composite summary of the essence of the

participants' lived experiences. I also utilized the computer program, Dedoose, to assist in finding significant statements.

These analytical procedures proved beneficial in organizing the vast amount of data that develops in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007). The five-phase process took me from each initial participant interview, to the summarization of the significant themes, and into a composite summary of all participant interviews. These five phases cumulatively assisted in the development of the essence of the adolescent father's lived experience. These phases included the following:

1. Bracketing
2. Identifying meaningful statements
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes
4. Extracting significant themes from the interviews
5. Developing a composite summary of the emergent themes

Bracketing

Bracketing my personal beliefs about the topic put me in the best position to enter the adolescent father's world and better understand the meaning behind his experiences (Groenewald, 2004). I recognize my influence was evident throughout the process, from the formation of the questions, to the interview and the analysis of the data (Seidman, 2006). However, bracketing any biases to the best of my ability was a vital component to this study. I also use bracketing as a means to better appreciate and understand the perspective of the participants.

While the participants and I may share some common traits, my age, values, beliefs and marital status may differ. I was cognizant of not allowing those differences to influence the participants' responses. My personal experiences with this population has been limited primarily to my work as a high school counselor for the past ten years, and through my research on this project. Although I had associates who became fathers in high school I did not have a great understanding of the adolescent father's life. Since I was not especially close to my high school classmates who became fathers, I was not aware of the impact fatherhood had on them. I worked with one adolescent fathers in during my first year as a counselor. Before interviewing the participants, the majority of my knowledge about this population came from the existing literature. As a result, I was more cognizant of being influenced by the prior research than from

my own experiences with this population. Despite my experiences and the existing literature, I am confident that I was able to bracket that prior knowledge and remain open to new information throughout the process. This allowed me to have an open perspective during the data analysis process and not influence the participants.

Field notes were taken immediately after each interview or observation. To reduce human error that accompanies memory, each interview was processed using field notes (memoing), coded with the date, and transcribed as soon as possible after the conclusion of the interview session (Creswell, 2007). This process was repeated after each interview. The use of field notes and transcription was also the initial step in analyzing the data and developing preliminary statements of significance (Paschal, 2006a).

Identifying Significant Statements

I incorporated Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method of analyzing participant transcripts to identify significant statements (Creswell, 2007). He suggests reading the written transcripts numerous times to get a feeling for the content. This allowed me to identify the significant statements and phrases relating to the lived experiences of the adolescent father. Additionally, I used Dedoose, qualitative software to assist in coding and categorizing the participant responses (Summers et al., 2006). Specifically, this software was used to assist in doing line-by-line coding and the search for significant statements. While I performed the preliminary search, coding and formation of meaningful statements, the software was beneficial as a supplement to my analysis (Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004). Identifying significant statements allowed me to formulate meanings from these identified statements and develop them into broader themes shared by the majority of participants.

Clustering Units of Meanings to Form Themes

These significant statements and phrases were broadened into meaningful units (Creswell, 2007). These units of meanings reflect how adolescent fathers constructed fatherhood and the meanings they attached to fatherhood. Delineating units of meaning from the meaningful statements included identifying common and divergent perspectives (Jordan-Zachery, 2009).

Extracting Significant Themes

These meaningful themes were used to extract themes significant to the focus of the research. This stage involved reducing the meaningful statements down to their commonality to

all or most of the participants (Groenewald, 2004). This phase also included an exploration of the outlier themes, those views unique to only a few of the adolescent in the study.

Developing a Composite Summary

Once the first four phases were completed, a composite summary was developed. The composite summary reflected the essence of the participants' collective experiences (Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004). In keeping with the phenomenological approach, the composite summary also included textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007). As noted in Table 3.1, the textural description summarized how the adolescent father experience's fatherhood and the essence of his lived experiences. The structural summary provided an overview of how the adolescent father has experienced fatherhood.

Trustworthiness

Methodological rigor was addressed throughout this research project in a number of ways. The primary means of attaining rigor is through trustworthiness, which enhances the quality of the research. The four components of trustworthiness addressed in this study were credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility was addressed by presenting an accurate picture of the phenomenon. Perhaps the most important means of ensuring the descriptions and interpretation of data is accurate was through member checking (Creswell, 2007). Participants were given an opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy. They also had an opportunity to provide feedback on the analysis of data and clarify any misperceptions.

I recognize that regardless of my attempts to bracket my personal feelings, my influence was evident throughout the process, from the formation of the questions, to the interview and the analysis of the data (Seidman, 2006). The benefit of the constructivist approach is that it recognizes the co-construction of reality between the interviewer and the participant. Seeking feedback from the participants after my initial analysis provided that co-construction, thus improving the credibility of this research.

Transferability is established when the process and findings can be transferred to other situations (Creswell, 2007). I used thick, rich descriptions of the participants and the settings as a trail for others to follow. The detailed description will assist other researchers in comparing the participants in this study to others in similar circumstances.

Dependability seeks to find consistency between the data and the results (Creswell, 2007). To show dependability, the audit trail outlined in this chapter and enacted in my research was consistent with my findings. In this case, the composite summary is logically supported by the accompanying data. The members of the dissertation committee will be utilized as a barometer to ensure the data is consistent with the essence of the study.

Confirmability is achieved by keeping the data neutral (Creswell, 2007). The strategies outlined and employed helped limit bias in the research. I maintained a journal throughout the process to record potential biases or assumptions about the participants. This allowed me to monitor and reflect on my thoughts or feelings and address bias as it arises. The use of bracketing was also useful in achieving confirmability, as it contributed in the identification and segregation of prior knowledge about the phenomenon. This allowed the participants narrative to direct the research instead of any preconceived notions or knowledge. Additionally, my experience as a Rogerian influenced counselor aided my focus on the participant and his experiences.

The adaptation of Seidman's (2006) interview approach enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. As the interview was sequential in nature, each interview segment built on information from the prior segment. Subsequent segments with the participant serve as a barometer to gauge the accuracy of the information provided. This allowed me to observe and address discrepancies between the respective segments. The usage of field notes also addressed the validity of the study. To increase the trustworthiness of the study, field notes included the time and date of each interview. Additionally, participant interviews were captured using an audio recorder and interviews were transcribed directly after each session (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

Since this population has historically been mischaracterized and negatively stereotyped, I wanted to ensure that my interpretation of the data was accurately captured. The trustworthiness was also addressed by systematically following the phenomenological strategies outlined by prior researchers (Creswell, 2007; Groenewald, 2004). Creswell's (2007) standard to assess the quality of a phenomenological study was used to guide this chapter. This includes the following:

- conveying a clear understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology.
- clearly articulating the phenomenon.
- appropriately using phenomenological procedures of data analysis.

- conveying the essence of the participants' experiences, including descriptive and contextual summaries.
- being reflexive throughout the study.

Each of the items outlined by Creswell was addressed either explicitly or implicitly. The need for this study is articulated in chapter one and in the literature review of this study. The phenomenological procedures, influenced by Creswell (2007) and Colaizzi (1978), are detailed in this chapter. The essence of the participants' experience is narrated in the composite summary. My training and experience as a professional school counselor assisted me in being reflexive.

Despite efforts to establish trustworthiness through the procedures outlined, there are limits. Although this study provided the framework for adolescent fathers to describe how they understand and make meaning of their experiences. However, it is not generalizable to all adolescent fathers but instead will allow for greater understanding of this marginalized population.

Summary

The goal of this project was to describe how adolescent fathers understand and make meaning of their experiences. The methods outlined for this qualitative study provided the framework to explore the lived experiences of adolescent fathers. The adherence to the phenomenological framework and the measures to establish trustworthiness throughout the research project helped ensure this study attained methodological rigor.

The transcendental phenomenological framework also provided the necessary structure to analyze the results and provide a discussion of the results. Additionally, incorporating the ecological and social constructivism frameworks provided the foundation to holistically analyze the adolescent fathers' narratives. The ecological framework helped frame the environmental factors directly or indirectly influencing the participants. The constructivism paradigm suggests that reality is a socially constructed concept. This framework proved beneficial in understanding the views, cultural influences, and perceptions of the participants.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of adolescent fathers in a suburban environment in Northern Virginia. The research questions focused on the adolescent father's lived experiences by capturing the essence of the participant's view of and behaviors as a father. The research questions that guided this study included the following:

How would you describe your life before becoming a father?

As a father, what are your current experiences with your child?

In your own words, how do you describe what it means to be a father?

This chapter begins with a demographic overview of the study participants followed by a review of the data analysis procedures. The results are presented through the themes that emerged and the essence of the participants lived experience as a *transformative process*.

Participants

This phenomenological study used a purposeful sample of nine adolescent fathers. The racial backgrounds of the participants reflect the diversity found in the Northern Virginia suburb from which the sample was drawn. The racial makeup of the participants included 5 Hispanic (56%), 2 African-American (22%), 1 Caucasian (11%), and 1 Asian (11%). They ranged in age from 16 to 19 years of age with an average age of 18. The average age the participants became fathers was 17. The average age of the maternal parent was 17. Each adolescent father had one child, with an average age of the child being 6 months. The fathers spend an average of 3 hours per day with their child. Eight of the nine adolescent fathers were still romantically involved with the child's mother. The father who was not romantically involved with the maternal parent had full custody of his child. While each participant resides at home and remains financially dependent on his parents, the majority (67%) co-reside with his partner and her family at least 4 days per week. The majority (n=6) of the fathers maintain part-time employment. Seven of the participants were full time high school students. The two remaining participants work full-time and are pursuing studies at a local community college.

Data Analysis Procedures

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) indicate that phenomenological analysis resists describing specific analytic techniques to avoid the inflexibility associated with quantitative research.

However, I followed Creswell's (2007) approach, a five-phase process outlined in Chapter 3 of this project, to enhance both the credibility and dependability of the study. This process included bracketing my personal knowledge about the phenomenon, reading the transcripts repeatedly to identify meaningful statements, developing clusters of meanings from the significant statements, extracting significant themes relevant to the research questions, and developing an essence of the adolescent father's lived experiences.

Credibility was established through member checks with participants to ensure the interpretation of the data was accurate. As previously noted, bracketing my personal feelings proved vital in capturing the essence of the adolescent father's lived experiences. Triangulation through peer reviews with members of the dissertation committee reviewing the procedures and results ensured the data was consistent with the purpose of the study. Additionally, providing rich, detailed descriptions of the participants and settings allow other researchers to understand the participants in this study.

This study consisted of three rounds of interviews with three participants in each round. For example, after completing the first three interviews in September 2012, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. The content was read multiple times to identify significant statements from the interview. A coding iteration table (Appendix H) proved useful in tracking significant statements and phrases. Open coding was used to examine and deconstruct these significant statements and phrases to better understand what the adolescent father was saying. The research questions served as a guide to the open coding process.

The hardcopy protocol of transcribing, checking for accuracy, identifying significant statements, updating the iteration table, and using open coding was repeated for the three interviews in each round. The second round of interviews was completed in October 2012, and analysis was completed using the hardcopy protocol. After completing round two, the initial round of interviews was included and all six interview transcriptions were reread. Additional significant statements were identified and coded.

Dedoose, a computer program for qualitative analysis, was used to get a greater sense of the "whole" by uploading the six transcripts without identifying dates or markers. Dedoose allowed me to identify significant statements, place codes on the statements, and link to the three research questions. Throughout this protocol, I sought to identify additional significant statements, which were coded to the respective research question.

While processing the second round of interviews, certain patterns (i.e., themes) were beginning to emerge from the significant statements and coding process. Therefore, a third round of interviews was completed to see if saturation could be achieved. The third round was completed in November 2012. These three interviews were processed using the same hardcopy protocol. The final three transcriptions were uploaded to Dedoose and all nine interviews were analyzed. No new patterns emerged from this analysis; therefore, saturation was achieved.

Once saturation was achieved, all interviews were re-read so that all statements and coding could be verified. Axial coding was used to link the open coding to the research questions; this resulted in 11 emergent themes (Appendix G). The final coding iteration table (Appendix H) served as a master list and displayed a trail for others to see the logical progression of significant statements, open coding, and themes related to the research questions.

Member checks were completed in December 2012. One participant from each round who was readily accessible was selected to assess the accuracy of the analysis. In conjunction with the constructivist framework of co-constructing, participants, who were selected for member checks, were given a copy of their respective transcript, their composite profile, a review of the significant statements, and a verbal overview of the findings. These participants affirmed the information was valid for them and no adjustments were needed.

Themes from the Lived Experiences of the Adolescent Father

At its core, phenomenological analysis consists of identifying significant statements, generating meaningful units, and developing a description that captures the essence of the phenomenon. Nine adolescent fathers were interviewed for this study resulting in the identification of 140 meaningful statements and phrases that were coded into 44 open codes, which were linked to each of the three research questions through 11 themes. These themes were used to capture the reflective responses given by the participants to each of the three research questions (see Appendices I, J, K). These themes led to forming what is the essence of the lived experiences of the participants.

The research questions served as an outline of the lived experiences of the adolescent father. Each question played a specific role in gathering information on the participant's life prior to fatherhood, his current experiences as a father, and his definition of fatherhood. The following section is organized by research question and the related themes. Participant quotes are used to give voice to these lived experiences. Where detailed quotes are cited, R refers to the

researcher and the coded participant name is included in the exchange. The coded participant names were chosen by the respective participant to protect his identity.

How would you describe your life before becoming a father?

Unprepared for fatherhood. The majority (n=6) of respondents recalled feeling anxious upon learning they were going to be a father. Reactions included “I was scared” and “I was excited! I was gonna be a dad, but I was scared at the same time!” Another participant said he was not prepared for fatherhood despite taking care of younger siblings “I didn’t know how much work it was until I had my own kid.”

Family influence. The majority (n=7) of participants disclosed that they did not have close relationships with their immediate family prior to becoming fathers. Relationships were “strained” with parents, and one adolescent father characterized himself as “a bit of a knucklehead” and another as “immature” in assigning blame in the role they played in the relationship with their parents. However, upon learning they were going to be fathers, each participant directly or indirectly sought out their parents for support and advice. One participant remarked that he “didn’t have close relationships with people in my family” prior to fatherhood. He recalled being appreciative of his mother’s support as she helped him prepare for his responsibilities as a father despite the negative behaviors he exhibited in the prior months. Another participant remembered his father's advice when he learned he was going to be a father:

R: *Your father said, "step it up" what does that mean to you?*

Taco: *It means you gotta go out there and start working. You gotta be more responsible.*

Negative behaviors. A number of participants (n=7) indicated that they were engaged in negative behaviors prior to their child’s birth. The behaviors included excessive substance abuse (alcohol and marijuana), gang involvement, and school truancy. The responses ranged from “I wanna say I was living the lime-life, living fast, no goals, just being a regular teenager” to “I was really deep in some stuff that I didn’t want to be in.”

Child as change agent. Despite their age and the maturity level typically assigned to adolescents, the fathers in this study adapted to the notion of fatherhood. While expressing fear, impending fatherhood became a catalyst for change as the expectant fathers began reversing negative patterns and behaviors. For example, one father had run away from home but returned upon learning he was going to be a father. For another participant, fatherhood was the catalyst

for him to stop drinking. He explained, “I started drinking freshman year and when senior year hit I became kind of an alcoholic. And then, finding out I was going to be a dad, I knew I had to quit drinking.” One father’s quote sums up the view held by the majority of fathers “having her (his child) in my life is better than the life I had before.”

As a father, what are your current experiences with your child?

Child as change agent. This was a recurrent theme as the adolescent fathers referenced the impact fatherhood had on their lives prior to becoming a parent and again when discussing their current experiences. While a few addressed this question by discussing their responsibilities as a new parent, five fathers viewed fatherhood as a transformative process. Addressing the question about his current experiences one father disclosed that he “wasn’t this person before when I didn’t have a kid.” Another participant was more definitive in describing his experiences with his child, “My baby has turned my life around.” The father’s allocation of time also changed once they became fathers. Time spent involved in negative activities or with friends became less important. The fathers noted that they do not have time for games and have to “grow up and be responsible.” Now, they prefer spending time working, attending school, and caring for their child, as captured in the following exchange with one participant:

R: *So you feel more mature?*

Lee Jenks: *Actually, I do. It’s not that I feel it; I can actually see it in myself that I’m a lot more mature than I was before.*

R: *Tell me what you see?*

Lee Jenks: *I don’t play around as much anymore. I’m more focused onto my schoolwork. I don’t really worry about hanging out with my friends much anymore.*

Fatherly duties. Providing financial support and spending time with their child were common themes in the participants’ current experiences. Working and attending school were regarded as a necessary duty in fatherhood. Two fathers expressed regret that work and school took time away from their child; as summarized by this father, “I can only go (visit my child) four or five times a week because of work and school.” Another lamented the maternal grandparent is upset and wants him to be more involved, but work and school do not permit him to spend more time with his child. Participants described work as something they “had to do,” while time spent with their child elicited more enthusiastic responses. The fathers expressed a

greater desire to participate in nurturing and play activities when describing their current experiences. One participant expressed regret at having to work but used the weekend to enjoy time with his daughter, “I like taking her out to Chuck E Cheese or to eat and stuff like that.”

School as a tool. “Now I’m really realizing how important school is.” Educational achievement was a critical theme once the participants became fathers. Every participant noted that school was not a priority before fatherhood. However, that changed as the adolescent fathers began using *school as a tool* to assist them in becoming better providers in the future and role models for their children. Four of the fathers admitted that prior to becoming a father, they rarely attended school. Another father had dropped out of high school. “Getting into education” and “graduating as soon as possible,” described the sense of urgency expressed by the fathers.

In your own words, how do you describe what it means to be a father?

Provider. Each participant placed the greatest value on economic support. All participants linked providing financial support for their family with their role as father, as evidenced by this statement, “I got my own family, and I got to take care of them now.” However, they also recognized that they are limited, “I can’t support no family by myself,” one father recalled telling his girlfriend. Instead, they rely on their parents and part-time employment as 67% have part-time jobs to provide supplemental support. As a result, the adolescent fathers provide partial support and rely on their parents for additional financial support. Primary support is provided by the maternal parent and her family for 8 of the 9 adolescent fathers. The fathers provided items such as formula, diapers, clothes, and food.

Family influence. While the majority (n=7) of participants disclosed that they had strained relationships with their immediate family prior to becoming fathers, they cited their parents as their primary support after the birth of their child. The majority of adolescent fathers also cited a male role model (father or uncle) as influential, while one participant referenced his mother as the primary role model. Each participant placed the greatest value on economic support; however, none of the fathers in this study provided the majority of the financial support. Instead, they rely on their parents or part-time jobs to provide supplemental support. One father, who has custody of his daughter and works two full-time jobs while his mother cares for his child, expressed his appreciation in this excerpt:

Austin: *When I moved back home, my mom and stepdad just took the pressure off my shoulders completely. They knew what I was going through. They basically*

raised my baby for me for a couple of months while I got over my depression. I mean the fact that my mom is a stay at home mom, she takes care of my daughter now just takes the pressure off me. It's easy to...I'm not going to complain about what I've been through is messed up, it's a challenge. But a lot of times people go through that and don't have the support I have. You know what I mean? And don't have the opportunities and advantages I have, so I try to be really positive.

R: *Earlier you said your mom said you just have to 'man-up' do you feel like you've done that?*

Austin: *Yeah, I feel like I've done it to an extent. There are things I could be doing more, just because my mom raises my baby when I'm not home. I work a lot.*

The family also played a role in the adolescent father's familiarity with young children. Those with younger siblings were more apt to change diapers, feed, and spend extended time alone with their child. Six of the nine participants have younger siblings they helped care for thus increasing their comfort level with their own children as illustrated in the following:

R: *Is having a child what you expected?*

Biggs: *It's not what I expected but I think, it's not as hard as people say it is. It's not hard, not easy.*

R: *Well, there are those who say it is difficult. What makes you handle it so well?*

Biggs: *Because I have experience with little babies. My little sister, she's like my daughter. I take care of her. When she was born, when she'd wake up, I'd change her diaper and all, so I pretty much know about babies.*

Active involvement. Recognizing their limitations as providers, the fathers appeared to compensate with a commitment to remain involved with their children. While all expressed fatherhood through the theme as *provider*, adolescent fathers expounded on their activities with greater passion as the majority (78%) of fathers were enthusiastic about being an involved and nurturing father. Additionally, many of the fathers perceive "being there" both emotionally and physically as the most important attribute of fatherhood. Although the initial reaction for many of the adolescent fathers was fear and shock, they ultimately adjusted and expressed a strong desire to be actively involved in the life of their child. The fathers performed a wide variety of activities and functions that illustrated their level of involvement. Because the children are all

under 3 years of age, activities centered around spending time with their child, changing diapers, singing songs, and playing. This concept of being involved is illustrated by Lee Jenks:

R: *Tell me what being involved means to you?*

Lee Jenks: *Being there physically, emotionally, doing anything, I can to help her, help the mom.*

R: *So were you changing diapers and..*

Lee Jenks: (interrupting) *Oh yeah! I was the main one. She didn't even know how to change a diaper. I had to teach her. I had to teach her everything about the baby actually.*

R: *How did you know what to do?*

Lee Jenks: *My sister. Plus, I grew up around babies*

R: *So you were already comfortable around babies?*

Lee Jenks: *I know most guys aren't but I was changing like five diapers a day so it never really bothered me. I actually like waking up and seeing her right there. She's slapping at me and I go make her a bottle and feed her.*

R: *So when you are talking about being involved, you are involved in*

Lee Jenks: (interrupting) *Everything!*

Not all fathers were as involved as Lee Jenks was, but it was a common theme (*active involvement*) for most participants. Childrearing duties varied among the fathers. One father struggled to be more involved but cited stonewalling by the mother and maternal grandmother as barriers to his enacting that role. He was the only participant who identified this specific issue, as the majority of the adolescent fathers cited a relationship with the maternal parent and grandparent that encouraged their active involvement.

Child as change agent. This theme illustrated the adolescent father's transition from "the life of a normal teenager" to his role as a father. The adolescent fathers in this study described the birth of their child as the impetus for change. Additionally, it was a common pattern in their role as a father and how they defined fatherhood. For example, when defining fatherhood, seven of the nine adolescent fathers spoke about sacrificing their needs for the betterment of their child. One father defined fatherhood as "making sure my daughter has whatever she needs and then my needs come second." For many of the adolescent fathers, focusing on their child's future meant making behavioral changes in their own lives. One

adolescent father said, “I used to get in a lot of trouble and stuff. Having my daughter makes me want to get on the right path. Help her have a bright future.” Explaining why he was so determined to make his relationship work with the child’s mother, one father remarked that his parents’ divorce affected him greatly. It was his hope that his “daughter doesn’t have to go through this. I want to give her a better life than I had.” Others see refocusing on educational goals as the key to ensuring a brighter path for their offspring. As one father stated,

After I found out I was gonna be a father, my mind was like wow! I started thinking straight. Can’t do this no more. I gotta do this, not for me, for my daughter. I gotta go to school. I gotta finish school. Now I’m really realizing how important school is.

Becoming a father changed how some fathers viewed their relationships with the child’s mother. They viewed their relationship with the child’s mother as an essential component in their child’s success. Illustrating their view that an intact family unit was vital to their child’s future, one father said this about his rocky relationship with the child’s mother, “We’re both trying to work things out right now for the baby.”

Essence of the Lived Experiences of the Adolescent Father

The essence of the adolescent fathers’ lived experiences is found in how the themes that emerged in this study are the subjective meanings that these participants created (see Table 4.1). The adolescent fathers described fatherhood as a life-changing event; one that made them want to be better men so they could provide a better future for their children. While some were challenged by (young) age, (lack of) academic achievement, and (limited) financial resources, these adolescent fathers strive to be actively involved by providing for their children and helping them achieve future success. The essence of the lived experiences for these participants can be captured in their perception that fatherhood is a *transformative process*.

Table 4.1

Theme by Research Question

Prior to	Current Experience	Definition of Fatherhood
<i>Unprepared for Fatherhood</i>	<i>Child as Change Agent</i>	<i>Provider</i>
<i>Family Influence</i>	<i>Fatherly Duties</i>	<i>Family Influence</i>
<i>Negative Behaviors</i>	<i>School as a Tool</i>	<i>Active Involvement</i>
<i>Child as a Change Agent</i>		<i>Child as a Change Agent</i>

The research questions provided a sequential narration of the *transformative process* as the adolescent father's perception of his life prior to fatherhood, current life as a father, and definition of fatherhood. Participants experienced the *transformative process* from negative perspectives and behaviors prior to becoming a father (e.g., substance abuse, gang involvement, truancy) to more positive perspectives after becoming a father (e.g., working, attending school). Two significant themes reflect this process, namely *child as change agent* and *family influence*.

The theme *child as change agent* was a common thread throughout each research question as the participants stressed how fatherhood changed their lives. Before becoming a father, these participants expressed being scared as they were *unprepared for fatherhood*, experienced "strained" relationships within the immediate family (*family influence*), and engaged in *negative behaviors*. Once he became a father, the *child as change agent* manifested in *fatherly duties* and *school as a tool*. In describing what it means to be a father, the *child as change agent* was an impetus to focus on the child and for the father to put his life on the right path by being a *provider* for and having *active involvement* with his child.

The theme *family influence* was also an important thread as these fathers responded to each research question. This theme reflects how his family relationships transformed after he learned he was to become a father. Prior to becoming a father, the *family influence* was seen as a strained relationship with his parents. After becoming a father, *family influence* provided structure and support for the new father. His family became a source of financial and emotional support as well as role models in being a father. This support allowed these fathers to reengage in school (*school as a tool*), pursue part-time employment (*provider*), and be a father to his child (*active involvement*).

Participants defined fatherhood in the traditional role of *provider*, which was a difficult and often intimidating proposition for the participants. Without the work experience and educational qualification (e.g., high school diploma, community college training) to enact their conceptualization of fatherhood, being a *provider* was a challenging endeavor for these adolescent fathers. The majority of fathers indicated that their parents expressed, either directly or indirectly, that they needed to become more responsible in their *fatherly duties*. For these participants, they expressed the greatest confidence in their *active involvement* as nurturing and childrearing for their children. This is where these fathers experienced a level of control in being a father. One father in recognizing his inability to provide financially tried to compensate by

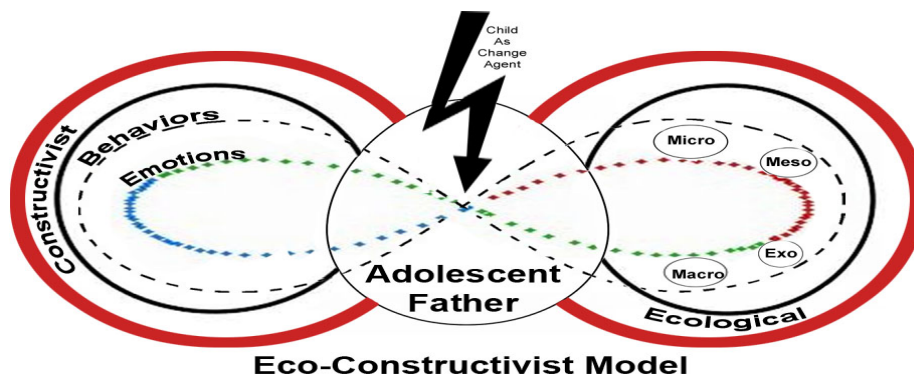
being actively involved and supporting the mother: “Being there for her too, and making sure she has everything she needs. I take care of our kid as much as I can.” The positive reinforcement adolescent fathers received from being actively involved encouraged them to continue these behaviors. For these participants, their definition of fatherhood was about their *active involvement* (i.e., “being there”).

Eco-Constructive Framework for the Transformative Process

An eco-constructivist perspective can provide an appropriate framework to better understand the subjective meanings the adolescent fathers attached to their lived experiences throughout the *transformative process*. Adapting from Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) model, the ecological perspective is a useful lens for viewing the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems as the holistic context for the lived experiences of these adolescent fathers. The constructivist perspective provides the personal narrative from each father to better understand how he makes meaning of his experiences through his behaviors and emotions.

Figure 4.1 is a visual model of the *transformative process* that emerged from the current study. The individual is the center of the process where his personal narrative is the interactions between his context (i.e., ecological systems) and his constructivist (i.e., subjective) experiences. The father’s ecological systems includes the following: micro-system (i.e., father, child, child’s mother, maternal grandparents), meso-system (i.e., maternal grandparents, school), exo-system (i.e., working, attending school), and macro-system (i.e., values, norms for parenting). *Child as change agent* is both the catalyst and focus of the fatherhood process. This model illustrates the reciprocal relationships that make up the individual’s experiences (e.g. behaviors, emotions) and his environment (e.g., family, school) where the child acts as the catalyst for those relationships.

Figure 4.1. The *transformative process* of adolescent fatherhood.



In the current study, the *transformative process* was similar for each participant. Figure 4.1 illustrates the flow of the *transformative process* for these participants. This process reflects the influence of fatherhood on the participants and interactions with their environment: (a) The constructivist side of this figure reflects his life experiences as a father; (b) the ecological side reflects interactions with his environment. For example, *prior to becoming a father* phase was marked by his feelings of anxiety and feeling unprepared for the task of fatherhood. With the child acting as his *change agent*, the adolescent father began eliminating *negative behaviors* in preparation for his new role. However, with the impending birth of his child as the catalyst (*child as change agent*), a conscious decision was made to take a step back and change behaviors that were deemed negative. The elimination of *negative behaviors* coincided with the *family influence* becoming more prominent; thereby, a reciprocal interaction with his ecological systems occurred. By providing housing and financial assistance, the family removed potential sources of stress for the new father. In addressing the anxiety associated with being the primary *provider*, the adolescent father concentrated on his *fatherly duties*, such as providing financial support, working, and fulfilling educational requirements, and his *active involvement*, such as childrearing activities, nurturing, and being there both physically and emotionally. The motivation triggered by the birth of his child (*child as a change agent*) influenced his interactions with the educational system as he focused on completing his educational requirements (*school as a tool*).

The excerpt below illustrates the transformative process. Quin's response was indicative of all the participants as they attempted to enact their vision of fatherhood. He considered his behavior prior to fatherhood and recognized that he needed to make major changes to fulfill his new role as father.

R: *In your own words, what's it like to be a father?*

Quin: *For me it's a big responsibility. It's not hard. It is hard but it's not impossible. As long as you try your best for your kid. You gotta be smart. You really gotta think about what you doing when you have a kid [5 second pause]. When I didn't have a kid, I was like 'F. life' I really didn't care about my life or about school. And after, when I found out I was gonna have a kid I was like 'damn, I'm about to be a dad. I'm doing this and that. This is not going to get me nowhere. This is gonna get me in trouble. After I found out I was gonna be a father, my mind was*

like wow! I started thinking straight. Can't do this no more. I gotta do this, not for me, for my daughter. I gotta go to school. I gotta finish school. Now I'm really realizing how important school is. I couldn't even get a job. I got my mind really straight after that.

R: *So you feel the birth changed you?*

Quin: *Yeah, it changed me completely. I wasn't this person before I..when I didn't have a kid.*

R: *So you viewed yourself as a kid before...*

Quin: [interrupting] *Yeah! I became more responsible.*

R: *What is your role in your daughter's life as she grows up?*

Quin: *I don't understand.*

R: *Do you have certain things you feel you must teach your daughter?*

Quin: *I'm going to teach her...I want her to stay in school. I don't want her to do the stuff I did before like smoke, drink and messing around with guys. I want her to focus on school. Be a good girl. Be responsible. Respect people.*

Appendix L provides a profile of each participant in this study. In addition to the participant's demographic information (e.g. age, age of child, racial background), it provides an example of the *transformative process* for each father. It gives an example of his life prior to fatherhood and, with the *child as change agent*, how his life changed after becoming a father.

Summary

Interviews with nine adolescent males from a Northern Virginia suburb were the focus of this phenomenological study to provide a voice for their lived experiences as fathers. The questions posed explored life prior to becoming a father, their current experiences as fathers, and how they define fatherhood. Structured data analysis protocols were followed to maintain credibility and trustworthiness in identifying themes and weaving these themes into the essence of the lived experience: *transformative process* of fatherhood.

The birth of his child and the support of the family assisted in the adolescent father's transformation from adolescent male to an adolescent father. The *transformative process* for these adolescent fathers strengthened the family bond at a time when they were pursuing independence from their own parents. However, the birth of their child caused them to rely on their own parents for support as they, in turn, tried to support their new family. The birth of the

child presented a major shift (*child as change agent*) in the actions and mindset of these young men.

The *transformative process* signifies the lived experience of these adolescent fathers. Eleven themes emerged from data in this study and each played a major role in the adolescent father's *transformative process*. While each theme influenced the adolescent father's ability to enact his vision of fatherhood, two themes were consistent throughout each research question, *child as change agent* and *family influence*. *Child as change agent* provided the motivation for the adolescent father to make positive life changes in preparation for fatherhood. *Family influence* provided the structure and support to allow the father to enact his vision of fatherhood.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

A review of the literature highlighted a deficit in research relating to adolescent fathers. The adolescent father was not portrayed favorably in much of the prior literature (e.g., Barret & Robinson, 1986; Rivara, 1981). Practitioners labeled him as an irresponsible parent (Miller, 1997), and policymakers stereotyped him as a delinquent (Miller, 1997; Paschal, 2006). Additionally, research relating to adolescent fathers lacked diversity as prior literature focused primarily on inner-city African-American adolescent fathers (Gavin et al., 2002). The missing component to the research has been the voice of the adolescent father.

Addressing this void in the literature, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of adolescent fathers. The focus of this exploration was to gain a greater understanding of this marginalized group and describe the essence of their experiences. Phenomenological methods provided adolescent fathers an opportunity to narrate and construct their story. Phenomenological methods also provided this researcher with the framework to describe the lives of these participants through the meanings they attached to their lived experiences (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999; Seidman, 2006). To best capture the lived experiences of the participants, I used a semi-structured interview format to explore the adolescent father's life prior to fatherhood, his current experiences as a father, and his definition of fatherhood.

A purposeful sample of nine adolescent fathers of various races reflected the diversity found in the Northern Virginia suburb where the sample was drawn. The racial makeup of the participants included 5 Hispanic (56%), 2 African-American (22%), 1 Caucasian (11%), and 1 Asian (11%). They ranged in age from 16 to 19 years of age with an average age of 18. The average age at which the participants became fathers was 17; the average age of the maternal parent was 17. Each adolescent father had one child with an average age of the child being 6 months.

A Synthesis of the Results

Although each participant is unique and experiences fatherhood differently, the essence of the lived experience was the *transformative process* of fatherhood. The participants repeatedly referred to fatherhood as a life-changing event. Becoming a father altered their relationship with their own parents, their educational goals, and their view of the future. Perhaps most significant was how readily the father shifted focus from his own needs to the needs of his

child once he learned he was going to be a father. The process began with concerns about being unprepared and transformed into *active involvement* as a father. For some participants, the *transformative process* was a refocusing on school (*school as a tool*) and establishing goals to prepare for their future and the future of their children. For others, it involved returning home after running away and eliminating negative behaviors, such as drugs and alcohol use. As Gucci illustrated, the birth of his child provided the impetus for him to make changes he was not previously able to address,

Home wasn't that well. It was always a lot of arguing. I started drinking freshman year and when senior year hit I became kind of an alcoholic. So that's why I said earlier it was rough at first. And then, finding out I was going to be a dad, I knew I had to quit drinking and finally I did quit drinking.

Prior to Fatherhood

The themes derived from the adolescent father's life prior to fatherhood were filled with feelings of being unprepared and exhibiting *negative behaviors*. However, the participants relying on their family support and influence used the impending birth of their child to prepare for fatherhood. The lived experience of the adolescent father began with feelings of anxiety and fear at the prospect of being a father. These participants described themselves as being *unprepared for fatherhood* mixed with feelings of anxiety when recalling the feelings that accompanied their new role. Many admitted to being involved in *negative behaviors* with activities ranging from school truancy to drug and alcohol use; however, they used the impending birth of their child as an opportunity to change the direction of their lives (*child as change agent*).

Support from the paternal parent helped transition the adolescent from anxious to excited (*family influence*). Interestingly, the majority of participants did not have close relationships with their parents prior to fatherhood. However, recognizing that they could not navigate this new life role without their parents, each participant sought out his parent/s for financial support, emotional support, childcare assistance, and childrearing advice.

Current Experiences

The participants' current experiences revolved around completing school, working part-time, and spending time with their child. As was the case throughout the interview process, the fathers consistently invoked their *child as a change agent*. It was especially evident in their view

of education. School truancy, dropping out, or attending school just because it was required best describe the participants' view of education prior to fatherhood. However, upon learning they were about to become fathers, school became a tool to help them enact their vision of fatherhood (*school as a tool*).

Becoming a father also gave the participants a sense of purpose to complete school so that they could provide a better future for their child. "Getting into education" and "graduating as soon as possible" describes the sense of urgency expressed by the fathers. Four of the fathers admitted that prior to becoming a father, they rarely attended school and another had dropped out of high school. However, familial support and influence provided the stability and support for the adolescents to be full time students and use education as a means to change their lives.

Similar to prior studies, being a *provider* is the primary role cited by adolescent fathers; however, it remained a concept they were unable to completely fulfill (Paschal, 2006; Sullivan, 1989). The father's current level of support was often limited to purchasing baby formula, diapers, clothes, and food. As the following interview excerpt with Taco illustrates, the fathers attempted to provide food as needed. Although he defined himself as a *provider*, working part-time limited his ability to provide financially.

R: *So, Taco, what things are important to you?*

Taco: *Right now, just providing for my family. Trying to get them everything I can.*

R: *What things do you take of?*

Taco: *Right now I have to buy the baby clothes. Whenever they need something, like for food, I give them money. I give them money so they can have it.*

R: *Are you working full-time or part-time?*

Taco: *I only work part-time.*

R: *Okay, let's talk about some of your current experiences. Tell me about some of your biggest experiences being a teen father. For example, what's the most difficult part?*

Taco: *Just getting enough money. During the summer I'd have enough, but not right now. I'm just doing the best I can. I mean, I know I'm doing the best I can. I don't think there's much more I can do [financially].*

Despite their inability to provide financially, being *actively involved* both emotionally and physically was a source of great pride for the fathers and something within their control. For

these participants being involved meant “being there” emotionally and physically and included nurturing activities like changing diapers, feeding, and playing, as well as other child care responsibilities.

Defining Fatherhood

The participants’ definitions of fatherhood began well before their own experiences as parents. The ecological perspective informs us that individuals are influenced by their surrounding environment (e.g., friends, school, media). Their concept of fatherhood began taking root during their childhood through experiences with their own parents and extended family members.

Consistent with prior qualitative literature, fathers cited providing economic support (*provider*) and being *actively involved* as crucial to their conceptualization of fatherhood (Bruce & Fox, 1997; Erkut, Szalacha, & Coll, 2005; Paschal, 2006). The participants recognized that they were limited in their ability to provide financially and compensated by being there (*active involvement*) and being an influential component in raising their child.

Family influence was the primary reference in the adolescent fathers’ definition of fatherhood. Although other environmental influences surely played a role, these participants repeatedly cited their parents as their primary role models in defining fatherhood. Two participants reported that familial support was not present for them during childhood. However, they used this lack of support as motivation to provide a better life for their child, as evidenced by Avon, “My dad is around, but he was never really a dad.” In addition, Lee Jenks “I want to give her a better life than I had.” Despite not having the parental support, the extended families of these two participants, acting as surrogates, were instrumental in shaping their conceptualization of fatherhood. The extended families also provided housing, financial support, and assisted in childrearing.

Despite defining fatherhood in the traditional *provider* role, the adolescent fathers viewed “being there” (*active involvement*) as essential to providing for their child. For Taco, “being there” was influenced by seeing his stepfather take over after his biological father abandoned the family. He cited him as “the one who's taught me everything so far. He's always been there.” When asked to define what “being there” meant, Taco cited his stepfather’s influence, “Being there physically, emotionally, doing anything I can to help her, help the mom.” The consensus

among the participants was that the father's role must include being actively involved in their child's life. In their own words, the following is a list of the most commonly cited definitions:

- *Step up and be there.*
- *I gotta do what I gotta do and grow up.*
- *Make sure my daughter has whatever she needs and then my needs come second.*
- *Being there.*
- *Be there with them.*
- *I do whatever I gotta do.*
- *A father is there to provide and take care of his family.*
- *A father is a man, like I said, who takes care of his kid.*
- *For me it's a big responsibility. It is hard but it's not impossible.*
- *Anybody can be a father, but a real man has to stay there and raise his kid forever.*

Triangulation of Findings

The findings from the current study can be triangulated with prior literature. This section reviews how the current findings both converge and diverge from the existing literature.

Convergent

Consistent with prior literature (see Table 2.3), the participants' conceptualization of fatherhood was reflective of the changes in his aspirations for involvement. These participants broadened the view of fatherhood by wanting to be actively involved and displaying a generative perspective. Despite not being able to enact their idealistic goals as a provider, viewing their role in aspirational terms may assist them in developing plans to build a more secure future for themselves and their children.

The ecological perspective provided the framework to observe the role family influence, peer factors, and environmental influences played in the adolescent father's conceptualization and enactment of fatherhood (Palkovtiz & Palm, 2009). Prior researchers used the ecological perspective to better understand the layers that influence the adolescent father (see Table 2.5). It also assisted in viewing the various roles and behaviors of the adolescent father (Miller, 1997).

While the results may vary from study to study, the framework provides researchers a lens to view adolescent fatherhood from various levels. In this study, the influence of the adolescent father's child (micro-system) is reflected in the theme *child as change agent*. Similar

to the prior literature, his relationship with the maternal parent was a primary influence in his enactment and conceptualization of fatherhood. Also consistent with the prior literature, the meso-system proved valuable in describing how the adolescent father conceptualized fatherhood but also in his enactment of fatherhood (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Rhein et al., 1997). This is especially important for adolescent parents because of their reliance on others, specifically their own parents. The primary exo-system for the adolescent fathers was the school system since many participants equated education with securing a more prosperous future for themselves and their children (Allen & Doherty, 1996). This system was evident in their focus on education after becoming fathers. The primary macro-system was exemplified by the manifestation of values instilled in the participants through their families (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Paschal, 2006). The values passed down from the family to the adolescent father were influential in how the father accepted his role. The installation of these values began well before these adolescents became fathers and can be traced back to early childhood (Paschal, 2006).

Sullivan's (1989) study of three diverse neighborhoods illustrated the importance of family and community support. The adolescent fathers in neighborhoods with the most resources (i.e., jobs, educational support, community programs) were the most involved and active. Consistent with prior studies, the participants in this study received familial support but were lacking educational and community support. It is unknown if this will affect their level of future involvement.

Family influence was also vital in describing not only how the adolescent father conceptualized fatherhood but also in his enactment of fatherhood (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Rhein et al., 1997). For instance, family influence was evident in the father's responses as the participants frequently cited the role of their parents in their conceptualization of fatherhood. Naturally, the most noticeable influence came from the father's family. As participants discussed their reliance on their parent or guardian for emotional and financial support, it was apparent that they were an influential force in how the fathers enacted fatherhood. This was illustrated in Tally's recalling his mother's stance about him becoming a father; my mom always told me "if you get a girl pregnant it's a wrap. You're going to man-up and handle the job." His mother's succinct words influenced whether he would be involved financially and physically in raising his child. This type of parental influence was consistent among the majority of participants.

Also consistent with prior qualitative studies, notably Paschal (2006) and Sullivan (1989), the adolescent fathers defined fatherhood in provider terms. However, enacting fatherhood solely in provider terms is often hindered by a lack of resources, limited educational achievement, and underemployment. The research also advised us that the majority of adolescent fathers extend fatherhood beyond the role of provider as most also include being actively involved as one of their responsibilities (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Miller, 1997). Interestingly, the fathers accepted their limitations in providing financial support as long as they were actively involved with their children as evidenced by this quote from Avon:

I don't do as much as my girl wants me to do. Her mom is always saying that I need to be more involved but I'm always around them. I can't give them money like I want but I'm ...I mean, I aint grown yet so I can't support no family by myself. But I know where they coming from because it's hard being a parent. So I do the best I can.

Prior research indicated that the adolescent father's relationship with the maternal grandparent was a critical component in the adolescent father's level of involvement (Miller, 1997; Paschal, 2006). In the prior research, the often contentious relationship between the adolescent father and the maternal grandmother contributed to a reduction in the father's involvement (Paschal, 2006). In this study, the relationship served as a positive impetus as the maternal grandmother's involvement was instrumental in the adolescent father remaining involved. She often imposed her vision of how the father should enact fatherhood. In fact, she played the role of the direct and indirect enforcer by challenging the adolescent father to provide financially and remain actively involved in his child's life. Indeed, the majority of adolescent fathers admitted that they often slept at the maternal parent's home with the maternal grandmother's consent.

Divergent

In one of the few studies focusing on the adolescent father's development, Frewin, Tuffin, and Rouch (2007) explored the "dual identities" facing adolescent fathers. The researchers sought greater understanding of the adolescent father's search for identity during adolescence, with the adult expectations and responsibilities of parenthood. The participants in the study were cognizant of their role as parents. They were also conscious of their limitations as adolescent parents but expressed a desire to be better parents than their own fathers. This focus on

intergenerational repair indicates a greater sense of self-awareness that has not been widely noted in the literature.

Unlike adolescent fathers in prior studies, the participants in this study did not consider dropping out of school to provide financial support to be a viable option. Instead, these participants placed greater value on being actively involved in child rearing and completing educational goals. Paschal (2006) also observed that the participants in her study accepted that they could not provide for their child. However, those participants were not using *school as a tool*. Paschal attributed this modification of the provider role as a societal shift. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Paschal (2006) cited the acceptance of working mothers and single-family households headed by women as the reason for the modification of the provider role.

Active involvement has been a consistent theme for adolescent fathers in this study and in prior research. However, the participants in this study may be accepting that role more readily than had been previously discussed. One study found that 93 % of adolescent mothers, paternal grandmothers, and maternal grandmothers expected the adolescent father to be present at the delivery, provide financially, be involved in care giving, and be responsible for medical appointments; conversely, 58% of the adolescent fathers agreed with those roles (Rhein et al., 1997). Whereas, the participants in this study expressed a desire to be responsible or share responsibility with the maternal parent in fulfilling those roles.

The majority of fathers stated that they needed to make lifestyle adjustments “because I want to have a good future and to set an example for my baby” was the response from one father. Departing from the participants in studies by Paschal (2006) and Sullivan (1989), none of the participants in this study viewed dropping out of school to support their child as viable options. In accordance with the generative perspective, the adolescent father’s in this study focused on their long-term goals and viewed continuing their education as crucial to being better fathers. They viewed education as crucial to developing themselves and beneficial to their children’s future. Participants in studies by Paschal (2006) and Sullivan (1989) were more likely to consider quitting school to provide support for their children.

By deferring immediate financial gratification and focusing on the future, these participants expanded the definition of fatherhood beyond the traditional provider role. Tally’s vision of the future for his daughter was for her to “finish school and do something with her life. Something she’ll appreciate.” For the participants in this study, school was used as a tool to

help prepare themselves and their children for future gain. This generative view of nurturing and preparing the next generation has gained increasing attention in adolescent father research (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998; Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1996; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999).

The divergent finding of *school as a tool* is important. In addition to the potential long term financial gains, building equity in education may also keep the father involved with his child over the long term (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). Prior research indicated that a predictor of adolescent father involvement lies in his ability to provide financial support (Paschal, 2006; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009). If the adolescent father is unable to enact his conceptualization of fatherhood, he often withdraws completely (Lamb, 2000; Paschal, 2006). However, as evidenced by the participants in this study, being actively involved and preparing for the future are roles they can actualize.

Departing from the literature, peer influence was not a major concern for these participants. The majority of fathers faced the difficulty of balancing school, family responsibilities, and their social lives without reticence. This contrasts with Paschal's study (2006) where adolescent fathers felt as if they were giving up their childhood to become fathers. The participants in this study accepted the loss of freedom as part of "doing whatever it takes" to take care of their children. Instead of feeling a sense of regret at becoming fathers or longing for their youth, the participants chose time spent with their child and girlfriend over time with their peers. In addressing the changes since he became a father, one participant revealed that he "don't play around as much anymore. I'm more focused on my schoolwork. I don't really worry about hanging out with my friends much anymore."

Prior research also indicated that adolescent fathers displayed a sense of bravado over their new role, equating fatherhood with sexual virility (Paschal, 2006). I found the opposite in this study. There was little bravado about being a father or macho attitudes about getting someone pregnant. In fact, they displayed a sense of vulnerability when asked about their reaction when they learned they would be fathers. The reactions ranged from "scared" and "surprised" to "excited." However, the most consistent response was a recognition that prior behaviors needed to change.

The divergent findings are important in further challenging the stereotypes previously assigned to adolescent fathers. As detailed in Chapter 2, the negative stereotypes typically

assigned to the adolescent father still exist. This study adds to the literature by giving adolescent fathers a voice to tell their story. Through their voice, we are aware that they define themselves as willing nurturers, involved in committed relationships, and who are invested in their children's future.

Limitations of the Research

The results of this study should not be generalized to all adolescent fathers. Participants were purposefully selected from a suburb in Northern Virginia, thereby, limiting the ability to generalize. Any conclusions are limited to the participants in this study. However, we can surmise the benefit of this research is to provide a viewpoint of a specific group, in this case a marginalized population whose voice has not been heard. Through qualitative measures, we have learned that the adolescent father views fatherhood through a lens similar to his adult peers. He wants to provide for his child, he wants to be actively involved, and now we are aware that he is concerned about the future well-being of his child. We also know that he wants to use education as a tool to provide for his family. As a result, educators are aware that programs need to be established and resources provided to help this population navigate their role.

Results were based on participants' self-reported experiences. Although I am confident the participants were forthright and honest, their responses were subjective. The historically negative view of adolescent fathers may have influenced participant responses by making them reticent to disclose information perceived as negative. However, I am confident the respondents were candid in their responses. Finally, despite the limitations, the use of open-ended, in-depth, face-to face interviews encouraged a deeper understanding of the adolescents' perceptions of fatherhood.

The socioeconomic status and cultural influence of the participants were not explored in detail in this study. Greater exploration into this component of the macro-system may yield more information relating to how these participants conceptualize and enact fatherhood. Since this study sought to explore the personal narratives of these specific adolescent fathers, the researcher did not pursue the socioeconomic status or cultural influence unless the participant raised it directly or indirectly. However, it is acknowledged that both are influential and should be addressed in future adolescent father studies.

Implications

Based on the research findings, we are aware that fatherhood is a *transformative process* for adolescent fathers. The ecological perspective informs us that adolescent fathers rely on internal and external factors to successfully enact their vision of fatherhood (Miller, 1997). The absence of these factors (e.g., family, maternal parent, maternal grandparents, community, educational system) makes the transformation more challenging. The participants in this study did receive support from their family, the maternal parent, and maternal grandparents. Most participants maintained part-time employment, signifying the community's support. However, support from the educational system was lacking. This section addresses the role school counselors can take to support and advocate for this marginalized population. Suggestions for future research are included.

School Counselors

Social service agencies and schools devote more resources to the child and mother to the exclusion of the adolescent father (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Miller, 1997). The schools attended by the participants follow this pattern. While there are programs for the adolescent mother, none exist for the father. However, the resources offered do not have to be a zero sum game with one parent receiving resources while ignoring the other. Assistance provided to the adolescent mother must also extend to the adolescent father.

The adolescent fathers in this study face significant challenges in trying to reach their educational goals. Regrettably, adolescent fathers do not receive much support from the educational system as they attempt to reach their educational goals. Referencing his daughter's recent hospitalization, Tally recalled asking his counselor for consideration in his attendance; he said, "[I] wished the school would work with my schedule better. If I have to leave, I have to leave." However, providing a flexible schedule or excusing absences is not a common practice in the school system.

Indeed, Allen and Doherty (1996) identified the educational system as one of the primary obstacles for adolescent fathers. Schools, including the ones the participants attend, fail to offer structured support for adolescent fathers. Meeting the demands of school and fatherhood become a greater struggle without support from the school system. The needs of the adolescent father are exemplified in this excerpt with Quin as he addressed the challenges he faced trying to complete school and meet the needs of his child and girlfriend as a provider:

R: *Tell me about some of the biggest challenges you face as a teen father?*

Quin: *Right now, one of my biggest challenges is finishing school and working at the same time. I'm trying to not get my baby's momma mad because I don't work.*

R: *Tell me more about that?*

Quin: *Like if I don't work, she gets mad. She wants money for the baby. Like before when I couldn't find a job, because I don't have papers, it was really hard for me to find a job, even a part-time job. So I said I guess I'll have to do construction. But they work too hard so I only worked there for a month. I don't want to do that anymore.*

R: *What did you say to your girlfriend about not wanting to work in construction?*

Quin: *She's not okay with it. She said if I want I can go back to school and get a part-time job.*

Quin's struggle highlights the need for additional support from the school system. The educational system follows the larger society in devaluing the adolescent father's role in parenting. Creating programs for the adolescent mother without consideration for the father suggests their role is not as vital. It also gives permission for the adolescent father to take a lesser role in raising his child.

Fortunately, the majority of these participants conceptualized their role differently. Their construction of fatherhood was to provide and remain actively involved in the lives of their children despite external forces. While the fathers spoke about their renewed interest in completing school, the concern was that interest will diminish over time without proper support and guidance.

While the participants in prior studies believed the personnel in the schools, hospitals, and court system were against them (Allen & Doherty, 1996), the adolescent fathers in this study displayed a sense of apathy. They felt ignored by school personnel but accepted it without question. While some schools in the area provide day-care, alternative schedules, and tutoring to new mothers, no programs exist for these adolescent fathers. The majority of participants admitted that they did not take education seriously and were not making adequate progress toward graduation prior to fatherhood. However, with their *child as a change agent* in the *transformative process* of fatherhood, these participants expressed a renewed interest in completing their educational requirements.

This study provides further evidence that these fathers not only want to be involved in the lives of their children but also view education as the long-term solution to upward mobility for their family. Without support, their conceptualization of fatherhood could easily become lost in low-wage jobs and uncertain futures (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). The adolescent fathers in this study not only want to be involved but speak openly about wanting to use education to pursue more prosperous lives for themselves and their new families.

School counselors must take advantage of the adolescent father's renewed motivation to complete his educational requirements by assisting him with credit recovery and career planning. Career planning for adolescent fathers provides a pathway to enact their vision of finding fulfilling careers and being providers for their families. This may also include offering online classes for greater flexibility with their schedules and providing tutoring to assist in making up missed assignments. To assist in the transition to college, counselors in higher education must educate themselves on the unique needs of the adolescent father. In addition to academic support, developing career plans centered around their interests, values, and abilities is vital.

Teen pregnancy impacts the entire community; therefore, high school personnel, particularly school counselors, social workers, and administrators, should form partnerships with outside social service agencies and clinical mental health counselors. These partnerships can provide an array of vital services to adolescent parents and their children (e.g. financial, legal, and mental health). Recognizing that involvement decreases based on the level of intimacy in the relationship, clinical mental health counselors can provide family and couples counseling to the adolescent father and his family. Clinical mental health counselors can also provide counseling services that address the stress adolescent fathers face in attempting to meet the demands of fatherhood while transitioning into adulthood. Since the adolescent mother has been the focal point, these services may require social service agencies to shift their definition of what constitutes a family. However, these policy changes are necessary if these agencies are to meet the needs of its community members.

For school counselors and other professionals working with teenage fathers, this study's findings help to inform practitioners about some of the psychological impacts and life transforming decisions that confront adolescent fathers and so extends the evidence base from which informed practice can draw. At the least, school counselors should play a supportive role

for young fathers and ensure that they are emotionally assisted and practically informed of all the choices available to them.

Future Research

Further research into how these adolescent fathers actually enact their conceptualization of fatherhood may prove insightful. While each participant was actively involved in childrearing, prior research advises us that environmental barriers (e.g., relationship with the maternal parent, educational attainment) may influence their continued involvement. A longitudinal study exploring how well these participants do enact fatherhood may provide insight into possible barriers that influence involvement.

Additional research is required to ascertain the educational needs of this population. The participants in this study planned to use *school as a tool* to enact their vision of family provider. They recognized that educational attainment is vital in their ability to provide for themselves and create a better future for their family.

It is not clear how many adolescent fathers drop out of school to provide financial support for their children since the majority of prior studies focused on adolescent fathers from low-income inner city environments. The concern with using such populations is that many of these areas have high dropout rates thus making it difficult to assign a causal effect. It is unclear whether the individual dropped out of school to seek employment or he was already considered at-risk. If so, then fatherhood may have been one of many indicators. An example is Weinman, Smith, and Buzi's study (2002) about the perceived needs of inner-city young fathers where 78% of the 128 participants were not enrolled in school, 29.6% reported they had been under legal supervision because of prior felony convictions, and 9.7% reported problems with the law in the past three months. While there is no clear answer, it reinforces the need to explore this group using a diverse participant pool that uses various socio-economic and racial backgrounds (see Table 2.5).

The fathers in the current study received a great amount of family support. Additional qualitative studies on fathers, who are actively involved without family support, is an area of interest worthy of pursuit. This may provide insight into how adolescent fathers stay involved without an element that was crucial to the participants in this study.

Summary

Fatherhood was a *transformative process* for the participants in this study. The research questions provided a sequential narration of the adolescent father's life before fatherhood, his current life as a father, and his definition of fatherhood. The narration showed the majority of participants struggling through adolescence yet using fatherhood as the impetus to make dramatic changes in their lives. Their focus shifted from themselves to the needs of their child. Adolescent fathers expressed positive attitudes about fatherhood. They defined fatherhood in terms similar to their adult counterparts. They want to be actively involved in their children's lives and provide financial support. Perhaps the most significant finding in this study is that adolescent fathers view fatherhood in generative terms and plan for the long-term interest of their family. The participants in this study expressed gratitude over the support they received from the child's paternal and maternal grandparents. However, the majority of participants did not feel supported by the schools. This is concerning because the prior literature notes that many adolescent fathers drop out of school to provide financial support. However, it may also be the result of the lack of support or alternatives offered by social institutions, like the education system. To better support the adolescent father's goals and vision of fatherhood, the educational system, including school counselors, must become active advocates.

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APPENDIX A

**Informed Consent for Participants
In Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Title of the Project: The Experiences and Perceptions of Adolescent Fathers
Investigator: Brian S. Maiden, M.A. Ed**

I. Purpose of the Study

I am conducting a series of interviews involving adolescent fathers between the age of 13 and 19. Participants must demonstrate active involvement with their child. Participants are those who maintain involvement that does not exceed two months without contact with their child. Participants in the study will include those from the greater Washington DC suburbs of Northern Virginia. This study will provide adolescent fathers the forum to detail the experiences and challenges of being a teen parent.

II. Procedures

Each participant in this study will be interviewed about his experiences and perceptions related to being a father. The interview is expected to last no longer than 60 minutes. The interview will be taped using a digital recorder to help ensure the interview is accurate (participants initials _____). Written notes will also be used during the interview. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. The interview will be held at a time and place approved by both the participant and the interviewer. The interview process may include a follow-up session to discuss your interview. Interview transcripts and results will be shared with you.

III. Risks

There is minimal risk associated with participation in this study. Participants may opt-out of the process at any time. The interview will be in a mutually agreed upon informal and comfortable location.

IV. Benefits of this Research

The study may not benefit you directly, but it has the potential to help other adolescent fathers. The research from this study will be used to better understand the perceptions and experiences of adolescent fathers. This is important to increasing knowledge for social service agencies, researchers and the general public.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

To protect your confidentiality your name and any identifying information will not be given to anyone. You will only be identifiable to the person conducting the interview. To further ensure your confidentiality, the audio files from the interview will be stored in a password-protected personal computer.

Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the data collected from this study for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline participation or to withdraw from this study at any time, without stating a reason for your withdrawal. You are free not to respond to any question or questions during the interview.

VIII. Your Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study as described above.

IX. Your Permission

I have read this Consent Form and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my consent:

Subject Signature	Printed Name	Date
Researcher	Printed Name	Date

Should I have pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subject's right, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Brian S. Maiden 571. 278.0038
 Researcher bmaiden@vt.edu

Dr. Pamela E. Brott 703-538-8347
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Institutional Review Board Contact
Dr. David Moore, Chair 540.231.4991
 Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board moored@vt.edu

APPENDIX B

Minor Assent for Participants In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

**Title of the Project: The Experiences and Perceptions of Adolescent Fathers
Investigator: Brian S. Maiden, M.A. Ed**

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I am conducting a series of interviews involving adolescent fathers between the age of 13 and 19. Participants must demonstrate active involvement with their child. Participants are those who maintain involvement that does not exceed two months without contact with their child. Participants in the study will include those from the greater Washington DC suburbs of Northern Virginia. This study will provide adolescent fathers the forum to detail the experiences and challenges of being a teen parent.

II. Procedures

Each participant in this study will be interviewed about his experiences and perceptions related to being a father. The interview is expected to last no longer than 60 minutes. The interview will be taped using a digital recorder to help ensure the interview is accurate (participants initials _____). Written notes will also be used during the interview. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. The interview will be held at a time and place approved by both the participant and the interviewer. The interview process may include a follow-up session to discuss your interview. Interview transcripts and results will be shared with you.

III. Risks

There is minimal risk associated with participation in this study. Participants may opt-out of the process at any time. The interview will be in a mutually agreed upon informal and comfortable location.

IV. Benefits of this Research

The study may not benefit you directly, but it has the potential to help other adolescent fathers. The research from this study will be used to better understand the perceptions and experiences of adolescent fathers. This is important to increasing knowledge for social service agencies, researchers and the general public.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your name and any identifying information will not be provided to anyone to protect your confidentiality. You will only be identifiable to the person conducting the interview. To further ensure your confidentiality, the audio files from the interview will be stored in a password-protected personal computer.

Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the data collected from this study for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline participation or to withdraw from this study at any time, without stating a reason for your withdrawal. You are free not to respond to any question or questions during the interview.

VIII. Your Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study as described above.

IX. Your Permission

I have read this Assent Form and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my Assent:

Subject Signature

Printed Name

Date

Researcher Signature

Printed Name

Date

Should I have pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subject's right, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Brian S. Maiden
Researcher

571. 278.0038
bmaiden@vt.edu

Dr. Pamela E. Brott
Faculty Advisor

703-538-8347
pbrott@vt.edu

Institutional Review Board Contact

Dr. David Moore, Chair
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board

540.231.4991
moored@vt.edu

APPENDIX C

Parental Consent

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Title of the Project: The Lived Experiences of Adolescent Fathers
Investigator: Brian S. Maiden, M.A. Ed

Your child is invited to be in a research study about his experiences as a teen father. Please review this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to participate in this study.

Purpose of the Study

I am conducting a series of interviews involving adolescent fathers between the age of 13 and 19. Participants must demonstrate active involvement with their child. Participants are those who maintain involvement that does not exceed two months without contact with their child. Participants in the study will include those from the greater Washington DC suburbs of Northern Virginia. This study will provide adolescent fathers the forum to detail the experiences and challenges of being a teen parent.

Procedures

Each participant in this study will be interviewed about his experiences and perceptions related to being a father. The interview is expected to last no longer than 60 minutes. The interview will be taped using a digital recorder to help ensure the interview is accurate. Written notes will also be used during the interview. Prior to the interview, your son will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. The interview will be held at a time and place approved by both the participant and the interviewer. The interview process may include a follow-up session. Interview transcripts and results will be shared with you.

Risks

There is minimal risk associated with participation in this study. Participants may opt-out of the process at any time. The interview will be in a mutually agreed upon informal and comfortable location.

Benefits of this Research

The study may not benefit your child directly, but it has the potential to help other adolescent fathers. The research from this study will be used to better understand the perceptions and experiences of adolescent fathers. This is important to increasing the knowledge of those who work with teen fathers in schools, social service agencies, researchers and the general public.

Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your name and any identifying information will not be provided to anyone to protect your confidentiality. You will only be identifiable to the person conducting the interview. To protect

their identity, participants will be assigned an alias. To further ensure your confidentiality, the audio files from the interview will be stored in a password-protected personal computer.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Freedom to Withdraw

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your son is free to decline participation or to withdraw from this study at any time, without stating a reason for withdrawing. Your son is free not to respond to any question or questions during the interview.

Your Permission

I have read this Parental Consent Form and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my consent:

Signature of Participant

Printed Name

Date

Signature of Investigator

Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Exploring Adolescent Fatherhood

How would you describe your life before becoming a father?

As a father, what are your current experiences with your child?

In your own words, how do you describe what it means to be a father?

To help ensure that I accurately convey our conversation, I would like to record our conversation with this digital recorder. Review Informed Assent/Consent Form. This form provides information about the study and says you agree to the conditions outlined for this study. This form is called informed consent/assent and it advises you that:

1. Your information is confidential
2. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time
3. There is no compensation for participation
4. I will provide a copy of this transcript for you to review

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Interviewer _____

Interviewee _____

Release form signed? ____

I anticipate our discussion lasting between 45 to 60 minutes.

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping society learn about the experiences of teen fathers.

Introduction

I am speaking with you today because I want to learn about your experiences as a father. My research focuses on the life of the teen father and you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share. I am not here to judge you or evaluate your performance as a father. Instead, I hope to hear your story, as well as other teen fathers, in the hope that others can learn from your experiences.

Qualitative line of inquiry to explore for this research:

- A. Life history before fatherhood
- B. Current fatherhood experiences leading up to this interview
- C. Reflection on what fatherhood means-conceptualization

A. Life History before Fatherhood

How would you describe your life before becoming a father?

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. Who do you model yourself after?
3. What things are important to you?

B. As a father, what are some of your current experiences with your child?

1. Tell me about some of the biggest challenges you face for as a teen father.
2. How do you handle the challenges you face as a father?
3. What are some of the things you do with your child
4. Describe your relationship with your child
5. What was your response when you learned you would be a father
6. Tell me about the response you received from those closest to you when they learned you were going to be a father

C. In your own words, how do you describe what it means to be a father

1. You indicated that the father's role is to...is there anything that gets in the way of you fulfilling this role?
2. Describe your role as a father in your child's life.
3. What things or people have shaped how you feel about being a father?

APPENDIX E**Participant Demographic Questionnaire**

Participant Name (Pseudonym):

Gender Identity:

Age:

Racial Identity:

At what age did you become a parent?

What is the status of your relationship with your child's mother?

Do you live with your child's mother?

How many children do you have children?

Does your child(ren) live with you?

If not, where do they live?

How often do you see your child(ren)?

Every day__ 2-4 times per week__ Once per week__ Once per Month__

How many hours per week do you spend with your child__

What is your highest educational level?

What is your employment status?

How old was your mother when you were born?

How old was your father when you were born?

APPENDIX F

Participant Recruitment Letter

Potential Research Study Participants,

My name is Brian Maiden, a doctoral student in Counselor Education at Virginia Tech University. I am requesting your help with a research study for my dissertation. This is a study about the experiences of adolescent father and his relationship with his child(ren). I hope that you will let me share your experiences in my study. Your story may prove beneficial to other teenage fathers in similar situations. This study may also help inform school counselors about the needs and feelings of teen fathers.

Participants in this study will be fathers between the ages of 13-19 when the child was born. Participants must not have more than a 2-year time lapse in their involvement with their child.

If you wish to participate in this study, please contact me at bmaiden@vt.edu or 571.278.0038. We will set up a time and place of your choosing where an interview can be conducted. I would also like to meet with family members who can provide additional insight into your life as it relates to your role as a father. I will travel to this site at the time indicated and upon arrival will ask you to sign the attached informed consent form which explains the study. You may ask any questions needed prior to signing the form. I will ask you to respond to a number of questions about your feelings related to your role as a father. To ensure that the information you provide is accurate, I will also use a digital recorder. The recorded interview will be transcribed into written form, which will be available for you to read and make corrections.

As noted in the informed consent letter, the interview will be confidential and your identity will not be revealed in the study. You may choose a pseudonym for me to use in the final written document to protect your identity. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the questions or interview situation, you may choose not to answer the question(s) or you may choose to discontinue participation in the study.

If you are willing to participate in my study, please contact me at the email address above and arrange a time for us to meet. Feel free to contact me if you have further questions. Thank you very much and I look forward to your participation in my study.

Thank you,

Brian Maiden
Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education

APPENDIX G

Themes

Prior to Fatherhood

- Unprepared for fatherhood
- Family influence
- Negative behaviors
- Child as change agent

Current

- Child as change agent
- Fatherly duties
- School as a tool

Perception/Definition

- Provider
- Family influence
- Active involvement (nurturing)
- Child as change agent (becoming more responsible)

APPENDIX H

Final Coding Iteration by Participant

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
<u>Avon B</u> I was very immature.	unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I guess you would say I was a knucklehead.	stubborn	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I didn't have close relationships with people in my family.	Strained relations with family	Family influence	Prior to
I've been around people with kids but I didn't know how much work it was until I had my own kid.	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I feel like I grew up on the streets	No family support	Family influence	Prior to
My dad is around but he was never really a dad.	No family support	Family influence	Prior to
We more like boys (friends) than anything. So I never relied on him.	No family support	Family influence	Prior to
I listen and learn a lot from the streets.	Relied on peers	External influences	Prior to
I was excited! I was gonna a dad! but I was scared at the same time, you know? I guess I had mixed thoughts about it.	Mixed emotions	Feeling about fatherhood	Prior to
I just felt like it was time for me to give the street life up.	Transitioning to fatherhood	Child as change agent	Prior to
Stop doing stupid things	Time to be more responsible	Child as change agent	Prior to
being a father is making sure I'm there as she grows up and to help her.	Perception of fatherhood	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
Her mom is always saying that I need to be more involved	Maternal parent expectations	Level of Involvement	Current
I'm always around them.	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
I aint grown yet	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Current
I can't support no family by myself	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Current
My mom told me I had to take care of my kid but I have to finish school too	Parental expectations	Familial influence	Prior to

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
<u>Quin</u> I was hanging out with my friends, going to parties, doing sports.	Being a teenager	Child as change agent	Prior to
One bad thing I was doing was not coming to school	School truancy	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I see her probably, like, 8 hours. They come over to my house on the weekends	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Current
I was scared	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Current
We're still together	relationship	Relationship Status	Current
It was really hard for me to find a job. Even a part-time job.	providing	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I'm trying to not get my baby's momma mad because	Strained relationship with maternal parent	Relationship status	Current
I don't work.	Not providing	Unprepared for fatherhood	Current
We're both trying to work things out right now for the baby.	Relationship issues	Relationship status	Current
I carry her. I feed her. I take showers. I play with her.	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
When I used to live with them, I used to feed her and put her to sleep.	Type of involvement	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
I don't go out with her, but I used to, me when I lived with them.	Changes in involvement	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
You really gotta think about what you doing when you have a kid.	Father's have to be more responsible	Becoming more responsible	Defining fatherhood
I really didn't care about my life or about school.	No life goals	Child as change agent	Prior to
when I found out I was gonna have a kid I was like 'damn, I'm about to be a dad.	unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I gotta do this, not for me, for my daughter.	Be more responsible	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I gotta go to school.	School is important	School as a tool	Prior to
Now I'm really realizing how important school is	School is important	School as a tool	Current
I couldn't even get a job	Provider unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I wasn't this person before I when I didn't have a kid	Became more responsible	Child as change agent	Current
I'm going to teach her	Father's role	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
I want her to focus on school	Establishing future goals for child	School as a tool	Defining fatherhood
I don't want her to do the stuff I did before like smoke, drink and messing around with guys	Establishing future goals for child	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I see her probably three times a week	Type of involvement	Level of involvement	Current

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
Me having my daughter makes me want to get on the right path.	Changing negative behaviors	Child as change agent	Current
well at first I was shocked	Feeling unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I didn't take it seriously	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I was in the middle of running away from home.	Strained relations with family	Negative behaviors	Prior to
Disrespecting my parents and stuff like that.	Strained relationship with parents	Family influence	Prior to
I used to get in a lot of trouble and stuff	Changing negative behaviors	Negative behaviors	Prior to
Help her have a bright future, like I'm trying to do.	Type of involvement	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
Just trying to get her to college and get her ready for life	Fathers responsibility	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
Fatherhood means being there for you	Father involvement	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
Being there..taking them outside whether its 5 minutes, 30 minutes or whatever.	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
Make sure my daughter has whatever she needs	Providing for child	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I do whatever I gotta do.	Providing for child	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
my needs come second.	Child is priority	Father's role	Defining fatherhood

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
<u>Gucci</u> Home wasn't that well. It was always a lot of arguing.	Strained relations with family	Family influence	Prior to
I'm a good guy, kind of. Friendly and easy to get along with.	Description of himself	Self-perception	Current
It wasn't like 'what the hell is wrong with you' It was more supportive.	Family support	Family influence	Prior to

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
<u>Lee Jenks</u> I was into basketball, football, I liked to go to parties.	Being a teenager	Child as change agent	Prior to
having her in my life is better than before.	Enjoys being a father	Child as change agent	Prior to
it motivates me to do everything more knowing that she's here	Fatherhood is inspirational	Child as change agent	Current
I can't just leave her out in the street or nothing.	Father's role	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
It was time for us to grow up.	Become more responsible	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
we can't just act like kids.	Have to be more responsible	Becoming more responsible	Current
I want to give her a better life than I had.	Fathers role	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
Yeah, because if your not there then who's she going to look up to, just her mom all the time?	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
Being there physically, emotionally, doing anything I can to help her, help the mom.	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood

Significant Statements**Open Coding****Themes****Research Question**Tally

Um..energetic, playful, always hyper. A quick learner.	Description of himself	Self-perception	Current
To finish school and do something with her life.	Goals for child	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
How to respect your kid because he was always respectful.	Parental Role model	Family influence	Defining fatherhood
He was a hard-working man	Parental Role model (no judgement)	Family influence	Defining fatherhood
Finding a job. That's what I'm trying to do.	Be a provider	Father's role	Current
work and save up a lot of money	Be a provider	Father's role	Current
I was living the lime-life, living fast, no goals, just being a regular teenager.	Being a teenager	Negative behaviors	Prior to
a regular drugged out teenager (pausing) if you want to call it that.	Being a teenager	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I was taking it day to day with bad decisions.	No goals	Negative behaviors	Prior to
So I was just really excited.	Positive feelings about fatherhood	Feelings about fatherhood	Prior to
I was really up for the challenge.	Positive feelings	Feelings about fatherhood	Prior to
My baby has turned my life around.	Transformative event	Child as change agent	Current
My mom always told me "if you get a girl pregnant it's a wrap. You're going to man-up and handle the job."	Family norms	Family influence	Defining fatherhood
I was really deep in some stuff that I didn't want to be in.	Overwhelmed	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I took it as a positive experience.	Positive feelings	Feelings about fatherhood	Prior to
I think at that point in my life I was ready to turn it around.	Negative situations	Child as change agent	Prior to

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
<u>Taco</u> I was excited and scared at the same time.	Mixed feelings	Feelings about fatherhood	Prior to
I'm definitely going to use this to turn it around	Transformative event	Child as change agent	Current
I've always been like really positive.	Description of himself	Self-perception	Current
She was seventeen when she got pregnant with me so she like understood	Maternal parent's response	Family influence	Prior to
It lead me to the point where I really didn't care about me	Strained relationship with maternal parent	Relationship status	Current
She was seventeen when she got pregnant with me so she like understood	Maternal parent's response	Family influence	Prior to
He's the one who's taught me everything so far. He's always been there	Parental Role Model	Family influence	Prior to
When I stay over there. I usually do everything for her, like feed her and take her bath	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Current
I try to go everyday	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Current
I can only go 4 or 5 times a week because of work and school	Actively involved	Level of involvement	Current

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
Biggs I just love my girl so much that I thought maybe we'll work it out if we have this kid.	Unprepared for fatherhood	Relationship with maternal parent	Prior to
Just providing for my family.	Father's role	Provider	Defining fatherhood
Trying to get them everything I can.	Father's role	Provider	Defining fatherhood
having her in my life is better than before.	Enjoys being a father	Child as change agent	Prior to
I only work part-time	Providing for child	Provider	Current
She said I want you guys to take care of yourselves.	Parental advise	Family influence	Prior to
I want you to provide better than I could provide for you.	Parental advise	Family influence	Prior to
She just wished I had waited a little bit so I could get on my feet and start earning some money.	Parental advise	Family influence	Prior to
He said "now you gotta start working.	Parental advise	Family influence	Prior to
You gotta step it up."	Be more responsible	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I think I'm a good father.	Fatherhood perception	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I try to get everything I can for them.	Providing for family	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I try to do the most so I can give to them	Providing for family	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
It means you gotta go out there and start working	Providing for family	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
You gotta be more responsible.	Providing for family	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I've always been responsible	Prepared for fatherhood	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I was taking care of my little brother.	Prepared for fatherhood	Nurturing	Defining fatherhood
having a kid, you gotta think about more stuff	Be more responsible	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
Just like, money-wise, how you gonna do that	Providing for child	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
How you getting to work.	Being a provider	Fatherhood concerns	Defining fatherhood
They told me I gotta work	Parental advise	Family influence	Prior to
They weren't mad.	Parental response	Family influence	Prior to
They were just surprised.	Parental response	Family influence	Prior to
They said now I have to work	Parents perception of fatherhood	Family influence	Prior to
it wasn't going to be the life I had	Be more responsible	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I got my own family and I got to take care of them now.	Providing for child	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I had a new life.	Transition to fatherhood	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I'd say me having to take him to his appointments and not being able to come to school	Lack of educational support	School as a tool	Current
being there for him and give him what he needs whenever	Providing for child	Provider	Defining fatherhood
graduating as soon as possible.	Educational goals	School as a tool	Current

Significant Statements	Open Coding	Themes	Research Question
<u>Austin</u> I could be doing more,	Unable to provide	Father's role	Current
my mom raises my baby when I'm not home	Family support	Family influence	Current
I work a lot.	providing	Father's role	Current
I was raised since I was little to be a lean, mean, machine and everywhere I go, to be the best I can be.	Family norm	Self- perception	Current
I'm really hard working.	A good provider	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I think at that point in my life I was ready to turn it around.	Transitioning to fatherhood	Child as change agent	Current
We fought for a year and a half for her custody	Relationship issues	Relationship with maternal parent	Current
If you can't take care of yourself you can't take care of your family	Being responsible	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
one of my biggest challenges!	Description of fatherhood	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I tend to get a little mad, I'm learning how to handle it now thanks to my mom.	Parental support	Family influence	Current
I like taking her out to Chuckee Cheese or to eat and stuff like that.	Active involvement	Level of involvement	Current
Anything that lets her know that I'm her dad and that I'm there for her.	Type of involvement	Level of involvement	Defining fatherhood
Get into education	Education as a priority	School as a tool	Current
Start doing things right.	Becoming more responsible	Child as change agent	Prior to
I started drinking freshman year and when senior year hit I became kind of a alcoholic.	Excessive drinking	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I knew I had to quit drinking	Becoming more responsible	Child as change agent	Prior to
I did quit drinking.	Eliminating negative behaviors	Child as change agent	Prior to

APPENDIX I**Coding Iteration****Research Question #1**

Statement	Code	Theme	Research Question
well at first I was shocked	Feeling unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I didn't take it seriously	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I was in the middle of running away from home.	Strained relations with family	Negative behaviors	Prior to
Disrespecting my parents and stuff like that.	Strained relationship with parents	Family influence	Prior to
I used to get in a lot of trouble and stuff	Changing negative behaviors	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I was very immature.	unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I guess you would say I was a knucklehead.	stubborn	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I didn't have close relationships with people in my family.	Strained relations with family	Family influence	Prior to
I've been around people with kids but I didn't know how much work it was until I had my own kid.	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I feel like I grew up on the streets	No family support	Family influence	Prior to
	No family support	Family influence	Prior to
We more like boys (friends) than anything. So I never relied on him.	No family support	Family influence	Prior to
I listen and learn a lot from the streets.	Relied on peers	External influences	Prior to
I was excited! I was gonna a dad! but I was scared at the same time, you know? I guess I had mixed thoughts about it.	Mixed emotions	Feeling about fatherhood	Prior to
My mom told me I had to take care of my kid but I have to finish school too	Parental expectations	Familial influence	Prior to
I was hanging out with my friends, going to parties, doing sports.	Being a teenager	Child as change agent	Prior to
One bad thing I was doing was not coming to school	School truancy	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I just felt like it was time for me to give the street life up.	Transitioning to fatherhood	Child as change agent	Prior to
Stop doing stupid things	Time to be more responsible	Child as change agent	Prior to
I really didn't care about my life or about school.	No life goals	Child as change agent	Prior to
I just love my girl so much that I thought maybe we'll work it out if we have this kid.	Decision to have child	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I was really deep in some stuff that I didn't want to be in.	Overwhelmed	Negative behaviors	Prior to
I took it as a positive experience.	Positive feelings	Feelings about fatherhood	Prior to
I think at that point in my life I was ready to turn it around.	Negative situations	Child as change agent	Prior to

I was excited and scared at the same time.	Mixed feelings	Feelings about fatherhood	Prior to
I was really up for the challenge.	Positive feelings	Feelings about fatherhood	Prior to
having her in my life is better than before.	Enjoys being a father	Child as change agent	Prior to
I was scared	Feeling anxious	Unprepared for fatherhood	Prior to
I'm definitely going to use this to turn it around	Transformative event	Child as change agent	Prior to

28 significant statements

Themes Developed

- Unprepared for fatherhood
- Family influence
- Negative behaviors
- Child as change agent

APPENDIX J**Coding Iteration****Research Question #2**

Statement	Code	Theme	Research Question
I see her probably, like, 8 hours. They come over to my house on the weekends	Time spent	Fatherly duties	Current
We're still together	Relationship	Relationship with maternal parent	Current
I'm trying to not get my baby's momma mad because	Strained relationship with maternal parent	Relationship with maternal parent	Current
I don't work.	Not providing	Fatherly duties	Current
We're both trying to work things out right now for the baby.	Relationship issues	Relationship with maternal parent	Current
Her mom is always saying that I need to be more involved	Maternal parent expectations	Fatherly duties	Current
I aint grown yet	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Current
I can't support no family by myself	Unprepared	Unprepared for fatherhood	Current
Now I'm really realizing how important school is	School is important	School as a tool	Current
I wasn't this person before I when I didn't have a kid	Became more responsible	Child as change agent	Current
I see her probably three times a week	Time spent	Fatherly duties	Current
Me having my daughter makes me want to get on the right path.	Changing negative behaviors	Child as change agent	Current
I'm a good guy, kind of. Friendly and easy to get along with.	Description of himself	Self-perception	Current
It motivates me to do everything more knowing that she's here	Fatherhood is inspirational	Child as change agent	Current
We can't just act like kids.	Have to be more responsible	Fatherly duties	Current
Energetic, playful, always hyper. A quick learner.	Description of himself	Self-perception	Current
Finding a job. That's what I'm trying to do.	Be a provider	Fatherly duties	Current
Work and save up a lot of money	Be a provider	Fatherly duties	Current
My baby has turned my life around.	Transformative event	Child as change agent	Current
I've always been like really positive.	Description of himself	Self-perception	Current
It lead me to the point where I really didn't care about me	Strained relationship with maternal parent	Relationship with maternal parent	Current
When I stay over there. I usually do everything for her, like feed her and take her bath	Actively involved	Fatherly duties	Current
I try to go everyday	Actively involved	Fatherly duties	Current
I can only go 4 or 5 times a week because of work and school	Actively involved	Fatherly duties	Current

I only work part-time	Providing	Fatherly duties	Current
grow up and be responsible now	Actively involved	Fatherly duties	Current
I was taking care of my little brother.	Nurturing	Fatherly duties	Current
I'd say me having to take him to his appointments and not being able to come to school	Lack of educational support	School as a tool	Current
Graduating as soon as possible.	Educational goals	School as a tool	Current
I could be doing more,	Unable to provide	Fatherly duties	Current
My mom raises my baby when I'm not home	Family support	Family influence	Current
I work a lot.	Providing	Fatherly duties	Current
I was raised since I was little to be a lean, mean, machine and everywhere I go, to be the best I can be.	Family norm	Self- perception Role model	Current
We fought for a year and a half for her custody	Relationship issues	Relationship with maternal parent	Current
I tend to get a little mad; I'm learning how to handle it now thanks to my mom.	Parental support	Family influence	Current
I like taking her out to Chuckee Cheese or to eat and stuff like that.	Play time	Fatherly duties	Current
Get into education	Education as a priority	School as a tool	Current

38 significant statements

Themes Developed

- Child as a Change Agent
- Active involvement, providing, nurturing=Fatherly duties
- School as a tool

APPENDIX K**Coding Iteration****Research Question #3**

Statement	Code	Theme	Research Question
being a father is making sure I'm there as she grows up and to help her.	Perception of fatherhood	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
I'm always around them.	Actively involved	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
I carry her. I feed her. I take showers. I play with her.	Actively involved	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
When I used to live with them, I used to feed her and put her to sleep.	Type of involvement	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
I don't go out with her, but I used to, me when I lived with them.	Changes in involvement	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
You really gotta think about what you doing when you have a kid.	Father's have to be more responsible	Becoming more responsible	Defining fatherhood
I gotta do this, not for me, for my daughter.	Be more responsible	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I'm going to teach her	Father's role	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
I want her to focus on school	Establishing future goals for child	School as a tool	Defining fatherhood
I don't want her to do the stuff I did before like smoke, drink and messing around with guys	Establishing future goals for child	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
Help her have a bright future, like I'm trying to do.	Type of involvement	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
Just trying to get her to college and get her ready for life	Fathers responsibility	Provider	Defining fatherhood
Fatherhood means being there for you	Father involvement	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
Being there..taking them outside whether its 5 minutes, 30 minutes or whatever.	Actively involved	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
Make sure my daughter has whatever she needs	Providing for child	Provider	Defining fatherhood
I do whatever I gotta do.	Providing for child	Provider	Defining fatherhood
my needs come second.	Child is priority	Father's role	Defining fatherhood
I can't just leave her out in the street or nothing.	Being responsible	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
It was time for us to grow up.	Become more responsible	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I want to give her a better life than I had.	Fathers role	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
Yeah, because if your not there then who's she going to look up to, just her mom all the time?	Actively involved	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
Being there physically, emotionally, doing anything I can to help her, help the mom.	Actively involved	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
To finish school and do something with her life.	Goals for child	Father's role	Defining fatherhood

How to respect your kid because he was always respectful.	Parental Role model	Family influence	Defining fatherhood
He was a hard-working man	Parental Role model (no judgement)	Family influence	Defining fatherhood
My mom always told me “if you get a girl pregnant it’s a wrap. You’re going to man-up and handle the job.”	Family norms	Family influence	Defining fatherhood
Just providing for my family.	Father’s role	Provider	Defining fatherhood
Trying to get them everything I can.	Father’s role	Provider	Defining fatherhood
You gotta step it up.”	Be more responsible	Father’s role	Defining fatherhood
I think I’m a good father.	Fatherhood perception	Father’s role	Defining fatherhood
I try to get everything I can for them.	Providing for family	Provider	Defining fatherhood
I try to do the most so I can give to them	Providing for family	Father’s role	Defining fatherhood
It means you gotta go out there and start working	Providing for family	Father’s role	Defining fatherhood
You gotta be more responsible.	Providing for family	Father’s role	Defining fatherhood
I’ve always been responsible	Prepared for fatherhood	Father’s role	Defining fatherhood
having a kid, you gotta think about more stuff	Be more responsible	Father’s role	Defining fatherhood
Just like, money-wise, how you gonna do that	Providing for child	Provider	Defining fatherhood
How you getting to work.	Being a provider	Fatherhood concerns	Defining fatherhood
it wasn’t going to be the life I had	Be more responsible	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I got my own family and I got to take care of them now.	Providing for child	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
I had a new life.	Transition to fatherhood	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
being there for him and give him what he needs whenever	Providing for child	Provider	Defining fatherhood
I’m really hard working.	A good provider	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
If you can’t take care of yourself you can’t take care of your family	Being responsible	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood
one of my biggest challenges!	Description of fatherhood	Child as change agent	Defining fatherhood
Anything that lets her know that I’m her dad and that I’m there for her.	Type of involvement	Active involvement	Defining fatherhood

47 significant statements

Themes Developed

- Provider
- Family influence
- Active involvement (nurturing)
- Child as change agent (becoming more responsible)

APPENDIX L

Adolescent Father Profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
C.J.	18	3 years	African American

C.J. classified himself as a runaway prior to fatherhood. With his child acting as a change agent, he returned home 6 months before the birth of his daughter. *After I had my daughter, I just felt like it was time for me to give the street life up. Stop doing stupid things and get into education....start doing things right.*

C.J. graduated from high school in 2013 and plans to attend a local community college.

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Avon	19	3 months	Caucasian

Avon's life prior to fatherhood was marked by drug use and gang activity. With his child as a change agent, he forced himself to "*step up, get a job, and make sure I was there for my kid.*"

Avon works part-time and attends community college.

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Quin	17	11 months	Hispanic

School truancy marked Quin's life prior to fatherhood. With his child as change agent, he expressed renewed interest in school. *"After I found out I was gonna be a father, my mind was like wow! I started thinking straight. I can't do this no more. I gotta do this, not for me, for my daughter. I gotta go to school. I gotta finish school."*

Quin passed the majority of his classes and is on track to graduate in 2014.

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Gucci	19	6 months	Asian

Gucci described his life prior to fatherhood as difficult. He with his child as a change agent Gucci indicates his initial reaction to the news that he was going to be a father was "*Shit! And every other cuss word. And what am I gonna do! I can barely graduate. It was more than scary.*" Gucci rebounded from his initial fear by moving in with his girlfriend and her mother, becoming sober and attending school on a consistent basis.

Although he is struggling to find employment, he is attending community college.

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Biggs	16	2 month	Hispanic

Biggs describes himself as “hard-worker, smart, just sticks to himself and doesn’t worry about anybody else. I’m not like a street hood or anything, no smoking or anything like that.” With his child as a change agent Biggs focus shifted to being actively involved with his son “*Whenever he’s sick I want to buy his medicine, take him to the doctors. As he grows up, when he wants something, I’d see if he deserves it. Be like a true father and not spoil him or anything like that. Whenever he has a problem in school or anything, I’ll be there.*”

Biggs is a high school junior and maintains a part-time job

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Austin	19	2 years old	Hispanic

Austin’s life prior to fatherhood was marked with drug and alcohol use, however, with his child as a change agent he is attending college and working part time. Austin engaged in a yearlong custody battle with the child’s mother. He ultimately won sole custody, largely because of the mother’s dependency on drugs and alcohol. With tears in his eyes over the break-up of his relationship, he recalled his feeling during that emotional time “*It led me to the point where I really didn’t care about me. I was at the point where I would do whatever I had to do to take care of her (his daughter).*”

Austin works full –time and attends community college

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Lee Jenks	18	2 years old	African-American

Responding to a question about how fatherhood (child as change agent) has changed him Lee stressed that he feels more responsible, adding “*I don’t play around as much anymore. I’m more focused on my schoolwork. I don’t really worry about hanging out with my friends much anymore.*”

Lee Jenks graduated from high school in June 2013. He plans to move to Romania and marry his daughter’s mother.

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Taco	16	3 month	Hispanic

Taco describes his life prior to fatherhood as “*I was living the life of a teenager. Going to friend’s houses, going over my girlfriend’s house. Just calm.*” With his child as change agent, Taco followed the model of his stepfather in placing great value in “being there” for his family. Responding to a question about what was important to him, Taco explained that he allocates his time differently, “Right now, just providing for my family. Trying to get them everything I can.”

Taco is a senior in high school and maintains a part-time job.

Pseudonym	Age	Age of child	Race
Tally	17	2 month	Hispanic

Tally rarely attended school prior to the birth of his child. When asked what was most important to him, Tally's responds "School, being there for my daughter, making sure she has everything she needs."

He is currently a 10th grade student. Tally has no specific future plans. However, he indicated that he will likely move in with his girlfriend and her mother when he turns 18 to be closer to his daughter.