

Why Young Men in South Africa Plan to Become Teenage Fathers: Implications for the Development of Masculinities within Contexts of Poverty

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Drawing on in-depth interviews with young fathers (n=37) aged 14 to 20 in impoverished communities in South Africa, this study focuses on the young men who intentionally planned to have children while still teenagers. It interrogates their reasons for doing so, as well as their responses to their impending fatherhood and reactions after the birth of their child. Reasons such as wish-fulfillment, leaving a legacy, wanting to keep a partner, and wanting to be seen as 'fashionable' amongst their peers are discussed. An analysis is provided of the relationship between young fatherhood, poverty and masculinities. Key to the discussion are the interrelated notions of ownership and responsibility, and the ways in which impoverished young men find young fatherhood to be a powerful mediator in contexts where alternative pathways to exhibiting dominant masculinities are scarce.

Keywords: young fatherhood, teenage fatherhood, intentional impregnation, masculinities, fatherhood, ownership, responsibilities

To become a father is commonly seen as an ideal by men across the globe, and a clear progression into manhood (Kaufman, de Wet & Stadler, 2001). Historically, reports regarding teenage fertility have been biased towards young women with little substantial focus on young fathers, making reliable data of children born to young men significantly difficult to obtain. With regard to teenage fertility in South Africa, it is estimated that 12% of women between the ages of 15 and 19 have ever been pregnant and 9% of these have given birth (Department of Health, 2004). Moreover, the 2005 national HIV surveillance survey (Shisana et al., 2005) reports that 20% of South African women, aged between 15 and 19 years, were pregnant at the time of the study. Young men often do not accompany their pregnant partners to antenatal clinics and are seldom present at the time of the birth. Consequently, few are listed on the child's birth certificate, often at the wish of the young mother and her family.

It is also reported that young fathers are frequently afraid to admit paternity for fear of not being able to meet the financial responsibility that fatherhood entails, or out of fear of being rejected by the mother of his child and her family (Swartz & Bhana, 2009). However, there are some young men who intentionally father children while they themselves are still teenagers and have yet to complete their schooling. Bragg (1997) estimated that 1 to 15% of adolescent pregnancies in the United States are planned, and the literature records only very few cases where young men intentionally impregnate their partners (Burns, 1999; Montgomery, 2002; Nelson, 2004; Shannon & Abrams, 2007). In the developing world, no published accounts of this phenomenon were found. Consequently, these young men are severely marginalized in research and their stories are

generally unheard. This study therefore draws attention to these young men who prematurely entered fatherhood, regardless of their life or social circumstances. It also offers cursory insights from critical men's and feminist studies globally (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2004) and in Africa (Morrell, 2001; Arnfred, 2004) in an attempt to understand how contemporary masculinities are developed and influenced by young fatherhood.

Growing Interest in Young Fathers

Over the past two decades there has been a growing interest in the phenomenon of young fathers as compared to the past emphasis on young or teenage motherhood. Most research has focused on British and North American (especially African-American) inner city youth (McAdoo & Leone, 1990; Dallas & Chen, 1998) and on documenting young fathers' own experiences of being fathered and their subsequent involvement and parenting styles (Broadfield, 2005). Others have focussed on young men's fathering desires (Morrell, 2007) and on fathering practices of teenage fathers from the perspective of young mothers (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). Consistent with recent literature, Pirog-Good (1995) points to the vulnerability of teenage men with regard to early sexual debut and subsequent entry into adolescent fatherhood. Young fathers are frequently those who exhibit low self-esteem (Eaton, 2003), live in neighbourhoods characterized by poverty (Brewster, Billy & Grady, 1993; Jaffee, Avshalom, Moffitt, Taylor & Dickson, 2001; Xie, Cairns & Cairns, 2001), have family instability (Fagot, Pear, Capaldi, Crosby & Leve, 1998), low educational attainment (Dearden, Hale & Wolley, 1995), and exhibit antisocial behaviours (Glikman, 2004). In particular, Jaffee et al. (2001) reported that children born to teen mothers were two and a half times

more likely to father a child as a young father (between the ages of 14 and 26). Other predictors of teenage fatherhood include parental criminal convictions, having a poor quality relationship with one's parents and having plans to leave school before the age of 16 (Hellerstedt et al., 2001; Jaffee et al., 2001; Quinton, Pollock & Anderson, 2002; Eaton, 2003).

While there is much we know about the risk factors for young fatherhood, the literature reveals an almost entirely absent focus on young fathers in the developing world or Global South. Furthermore, a key question to be asked is whether findings about low income fathers in Global North contexts have resonance with findings about young fathers in the developing world. So for example, Nelson (2004) suggests that men earning lower incomes may place a higher value on children despite the high financial costs, and that young men from low income communities may have a more positive desire for children than has been previously recognized. This finding complicates the validity of the one-factor explanation of single-parent households or low family socioeconomic status in predicting risk behaviours such as careless sexual behaviour (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). Rather, it suggests a dynamic interplay between personal, social and environmental factors.

Goals of the Study

To broaden our understanding around the conceptualization of the teenage father, his intentions to father and his experiences of being a father in the context of poverty, this paper offers a closer look at a small group of young men's attitudes towards fatherhood, circumstances surrounding their entry into fatherhood and their reasons for entering fatherhood prematurely. This article focuses on the research question, why do some young men living in poverty in South Africa intentionally plan to become teenage fathers. It does so by drawing attention to those young men who were open about deliberately becoming a father within a general study of teenage fatherhood, as opposed to the many others for whom their early fatherhood was both unplanned and unwanted. The research questions of the larger study were: 'How do young men living in poverty, and those ecologically involved with them, *experience* fatherhood?' and 'What are the factors that *help* or *hinder* young men's engagement in the parenting of their children?'

Method

Participants and Setting

This article emanates from a larger phenomenological study (Swartz & Bhana, 2009) that consisted of 27 'black' and 'coloured'¹ young fathers in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal who live in the context of poverty. The study regarded a minimum living level of under R600 per capita as an indication of poverty². Participants were eligible for the study if they were younger than 25 years and had fathered a child while still a teenager and unmarried. The youngest participant in the study was 17 and the oldest 24. The youngest age at which a participant became a father was 14 and the oldest 20. A snowball sample was gathered using community informants to overcome one of the largest problems cited in research and intervention amongst young fathers – the 'invisibility' of young fathers (Coleman & Dennison, 1998; Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Reeves, 2007). While this article draws on interviews with many of the young men in the study in determining reasons for becoming a young father, it especially focuses on the three young men who had intentionally fathered their children. Their attitudes and beliefs re-

garding fatherhood before the conception of their offspring were so radically different to the rest of the sample that their cases warranted further elaboration that could provide insight into the social construction of masculinities, as well as for further research and intervention.

Data Collection

The study proceeded in three phases: semi-structured interviews, social network study and debriefing and consultation. The first phase comprised two semi-structured individual interviews with each young father, for a total of 54 interviews. Interview questions were designed to be open-ended, obtain narratives, as well as provide young men with opportunities for reflection over the course of the study. In addition, two participatory and interactive activities were included in each set of interviews. The first, called a 'four field map' by Sturgess, Dunn and Davies (2001) presented the young fathers with, in this case, three rather than four concentric circles³. Young fathers then wrote down the designations (e.g., mother, uncle, friend) of the people involved in the story of them and their child, with their positionalities from the centre representing the closeness of their relationship. The second interactive component required the young men to list, in order of priority, three things or people that helped them be a good father, and three things or people that hindered them from being a good father. 'Good' was not defined.

The second phase of the study invited some members of the sample to participate further by interviewing approximately eight members of their social networks (e.g., mother of child, father, mother, sibling, teacher, friend, mother of child's mother, mother of child's father, mother of child's friend, community leader, nurse, minister, traditional healer, youth leader or grandparent). Thirty-two additional interviews were obtained through this means and focused on the role of family members and cultural practices in helping or hindering young fathers from participating in the lives of their children. None of the young men who intentionally fathered children, and who are the focus of this article, participated in this phase of the study, although some of the data we report on is drawn from this source.

The third phase comprised a debriefing and consultation workshop in which young fathers who participated in the study were invited to discuss the study's findings, clarify and question the analysis provide, or propose alternative explanations. This phase served three purposes. The first was to allow young men to meet together and form informal peer networks with other young fathers. Second, it allowed the researchers to discharge their duty of care with regard to young men for whom participation in the study might have proved traumatic. The intention in this regard was to offer young men, who indicated a need, opportunities for further follow-up and counselling. Third, and most crucially in keeping with the spirit of ethical research, young men were offered the opportunity to tell researchers 'what you think about what we've said about what you said' – the practice of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Christians, 2005).

Ethical Procedure

The study was approved by the Human Sciences Research Council ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and where young men were under the age of eighteen, from parents or caregivers. Young men were given written and verbal information regarding the study, and were invited to participate and to ask questions or raise concerns prior to becoming involved, and throughout the study. Steps taken to

ensure confidentiality included the use of pseudonyms, and the safeguarding of interview recordings and transcriptions.

Data Analysis

The interviews and focus groups were conducted in the local language of the participants and were recorded, transcribed and translated verbatim. The data was then open coded using a qualitative data analysis package (Atlas.ti) before a more analytical coding using narrative readings and thematic coding was performed. The qualitative nature of this study emphasizes the experiences of the participants and uses their own words to highlight differences and similarities in their experiences. In the following analysis each quotation is followed by a notation indicating a pseudonym, the geographical area of origination, and the young man's age at the birth of his child and at the time of the interview.

The personal stories of these young fathers in the informal settlements and townships of Durban and Cape Town, South Africa, have much in common and their stories, from (1) personal responses to fatherhood, to (2) reasons for intentional fatherhood, and (3) the reality of fatherhood, provide a platform for discussing (4) the relationship between young men, fatherhood and masculinity within a context of poverty. Each of these four topics will be discussed in turn as the primary results of the study.

Results and Discussion

Young Men's Responses to Impending Fatherhood – and Three Intentional Young Fathers

The acceptance of paternity is the initial invitation into the world of fatherhood and has personal and social implications for young mothers and fathers in the impoverished communities and townships of South Africa. Once paternity is established, the mother and her family have the right to claim financial resources from the father for the well being of the child. Fathers in amaXhosa culture may be obligated to pay 'damages' for the very fact of getting the young woman pregnant (*sikuhlawulisa isisu*), or if he wishes to marry her, 'bridewealth' (*ilobolo*). Similarly, in traditional Christian and Muslim families, young men are expected to take responsibility for the pregnancy by marrying their pregnant partner. However, it has become uncommon for marriage to automatically follow a premarital birth or pregnancy. Furthermore, due to societal expectations for the young man to meet financial requirements, unmarried young men are often filled with a multitude of conflicting emotions when learning of the pregnancy. Like Onathi, most young men are scared, frustrated and stressed:

I was scared of – I was shocked... And I told my girlfriend, 'Don't tell my parents... I was scared, because my mother and father spend a lot – a lot of money on me... I was embarrassed, because I know Ntombi was still young. Sixteen... I told my mother... then she was shocked... Then, there was a argument, and it was stressing me like – it was stressing... My father said, 'Boy, you're on your own. I'm not getting into that. I told you that you must use a condom. And why you didn't use it?' I say, 'No man, it was a mistake, man. I didn't mean for it to happen'... It did give me quite a stress. I was stressing big-time. My marks did go a little lower but, I told myself I have to pass, so I did. But – Ntombi being pregnant did stress me a lot. I was worried about who's gonna pay – who's gonna pay for the baby? Who's gonna support the baby? All those questions. I keep asking myself all those

questions. (Onathi, 20 years at birth of child/20 years at interview, Langa, Cape Town)

Experience of fear. The complexity of the varying and conflicting emotions experienced by young fathers is often followed by a surge of fears. The biggest fear for these young men besides the financial responsibilities expected of them, was telling parents and family members the news of the pregnancy. Young men told of how it was not physical punishment they feared but rather the emotional conflicts that ensued and the implications for their educational trajectory. Financial support for the child usually came at the expense of the young men's education. The pressures from parents, partners or themselves forced them to abandon their education or to watch their partners abandon theirs. Eighteen year old Marlon, from Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, who fathered two children, one at 14 and one at 15, relays his mother's response to the news of his girlfriend's pregnancy, "My mother said I must go look for a job. I must leave school and I must look after my kids. Then I left school and I found myself some casual jobs". A number of young men dropped out of school in solidarity with the mother of the child or spent a year or two working before returning to school. The harsh reality is that most young men who drop out to work to provide for their children seldom make it back into the education system. Saki, from Langa, Cape Town, became a young father at the age of 18, and his teachers got involved, "They wanted to know how she cannot be going to school whereas I'm going to school? She stopped [school] and then - I also had to stop then. Until my parents went to school, and then they sat and talked until they reached an agreement". Subsequently, Saki completed his schooling and asked his parents to raise the child with the mother of his child's permission.

Feelings of elation. Not all the young men in the study had negative emotional responses to the news of their impending fatherhood. There were young men who were 'excited' at the news of their impending fatherhood. Although Lonwabo from Langa, Cape Town, then 18 and now 24, did not intentionally father his child, he echoes the sentiments of those in the study who did become fathers intentionally, "I wanted to enjoy a child since the age of 15. I long[ed] for a child since that day! So, like um, I felt like shouting! I wanted the baby!" A few young men wanted to experience fatherhood during their teenage years and intentionally father children for reasons that seemed rational to them at the time. Three such young men were identified in this study: Nineteen year old Sakhile from Mayville, Durban; 18 year old Sabier from Bonteheuwel, Cape Town; and 21 year old Andile from Langa, Cape Town.

Sakhile became a father at the age of 17 and had been in a long-term relationship with his 18 year old girlfriend of three years before she fell pregnant. At the time he stayed in "KwaMaphumulo where my parents live... It's nine of us...seven girls and two boys". Although he has multiple concurrent sexual partners he believes that the mother of his child is "the one" and sees a future for them. Although most young men fear telling their parents about their girlfriend's pregnancy, when Sakhile did so he found his parents were supportive and understanding. Reminiscing he says, "They did shout a bit because I was still young; but it wasn't that difficult at all. I have sisters who had already had kids from other families so they were happy to have a child whose surname will be Dlamini". Currently he is a second-year university student and lives with his brother who is also studying. His mother assured him that she "doesn't have a problem, she will take care of the baby". His baby stays with his parents in one city and his girlfriend stays in another city

due to work circumstances. Although geographically separated they do have regular contact during holidays and when transport can be afforded. Sakhile tells that he had been “wishing” for fatherhood for a long time but was waiting for the right person. He found someone that suited his ideals and went about intentionally fathering a child with her, despite being 17.

Sabier also intentionally fathered his child at the age of 17, even though he, and his girlfriend (who was 16 at the time), had yet to complete Grade 10. He lived with both his parents and regularly smoked *dagga* (marijuana). The pregnancy occurred during the time his father had moved out temporarily. Currently, his father is living at home and his parents, together with the mother of the child's parents, have assumed the role of providers to his baby. He has dropped out of school after being expelled for drug use, and is unemployed. He and the mother of the child continue in a long-term, exclusive relationship and he sees his son four days a week when his girlfriend and the child stay over at his house: “Like they [the parents of the adolescent mother and father] worked it out so four days she's [mother of child] by her parents and four days she comes to us”. Sabier explains that he decided that impregnating his girlfriend would “protect her” from other boys who “wanted her”.

Andile was 20, and in Grade 10 at school, when he fathered a child with his 17 year old girlfriend. He had multiple sex partners at the time of conception of his child but reports becoming exclusive with the mother of the child upon hearing of the pregnancy. He is the last born of five children and stays at home with his parents, siblings and many nieces and nephews. His parents and his girlfriend's parents have assumed the role of providers for their grandchild. Andile began working at casual jobs in order to support the child upon hearing of its imminent arrival. Andile wanted his child because his “friends have babies”.

Characteristics of teen fathers. Although these three young men, all from different communities in South Africa, had different reasons for wanting to be young fathers, their stories reveal several commonalities. They desired a future relationship with the mother of their child; came from supportive families within disadvantaged community backgrounds; struggled educationally; and had attended no services or programmes about teenage pregnancy. At the time of the study they were all involved with their children. The wealth of literature linking family instability (Fagot et al., 1998) and weak parental relationships (Jaffee et al., 2001) to increased risk for adolescent men to become young fathers is particularly challenged in this study when reviewing the family backgrounds of Sakhile, Sabier and Andile. Sakhile describes his family's reaction to the news of his approaching fatherhood:

My mom is the one who advised me not to worry too much; she is going to take care of other things. I should focus on my schoolwork. She doesn't have a problem – she takes care of the baby. My sister is the one who informed my family about the whole issue because I was afraid to tell and I didn't know where I would start. My father was a bit strict but at the end he gave me some advice. He said that I have rushed to do this but I shouldn't feel bad and all that. Everything will be alright. (Sakhile, 17/19, Mayville, Durban)

Similarly, Sabier proudly commented, “They [his parents and his girlfriend's parents] were understanding and they agreed”. A sense of family support is evident in the reaction of the young fathers' parents to the news of the pregnancy and the subsequent caring for the child offered (and provided) by the grandparents. Both Andile's parents help: “Mom and dad, they

help to feed the baby and [buy] nappies”. Although the literature posits that large supportive and caring families are a preventive factor for teenage pregnancy (Fagot et al., 1998; Jaffee et al., 2001), for these young fathers it was found not to be so. This paper therefore looks beyond previously investigated reasons for teenage fatherhood (Brewster et al., 1993; Dearden et al., 1995; Fagot et al., 1998; Hellerstedt et al., 2001; Xie et al., 2001; Quinton et al., 2002; Eaton et al., 2003; Glikman, 2004) and explores young father's personal accounts of their experiences and their reasons for wanting to become young fathers – particularly in impoverished communities.

Reasons for Intentionally Becoming a Young Father

Along with their peers, Sakhile, Sabier and Andile offered a number of reasons for why young people in general intentionally become parents whilst teenagers, and articulated their own reasons for doing so. Amongst the most prominent reasons for early fatherhood were to keep a partner, followed by their social and peer context and ontological insecurities.

“I wanted to have a child because I found someone I really liked.” Smith (2004) and Samuelsen (2006) posit that young people think about relationships in terms of emotional investments and romantic ties. Sakhile's explanation regarding his desire for children and finding someone who satisfied his ideal of a potential mother for his future child clearly illustrates this:

I found someone that I really liked. We went to the same school and she was well behaved and I wished that I could have a child with her. It's not that it was a mistake... my wishes came true... [I didn't want it to] happen that I will have a child and my parents are no longer alive. It would probably become more difficult but maybe it would be better if they were still alive. I wished and it happened. I had a child in 2006 when I was in Matric. (Sakhile, 17/19, Mayville, Durban)

Harrison, Cleland & Frohlich (2008, p. 283) suggest that intentional teenage pregnancy “may resolve an immediate crisis and satisfy current needs”. Not thinking about future implications, and characteristic of the adolescent developmental period, Sakhile desired immediate gratification of his desires. Themes of desire, wish-fulfillment and partner suitability were derived from Sakhile's reasons for the pregnancy.

“I wanted a child with her because a lot of boys wanted her.” Sabier felt insecure in his romantic relationship with his girlfriend and tells how “a lot of boys wanted her”. He continues by saying, “She wanted me... so I thought no I'm not going to lose her... I liked her [and] we belong together. We [are] not going to let people separate us”. Sabier planned to impregnate his girlfriend a while before he asked her if she would carry his child. He says he felt ready to parent when he made his request to her. He explains:

I met [her] over Mxit [a cell phone social networking site] and she came to me like every second day. It went on and on and... we were going out for year and I asked her, “Are you ready now? For a baby?”, and she told me yes and I made the baby... Yah I planned [it]... I just told her that can we make the baby so she said yes. She agreed, because I first asked her I didn't just do it... Some of my friends are together with her cousins, see. So [they say], “I like her. I'll keep her.” Like that. You see, those kinds of jokes. So I succeeded! So, they were surprised when I came there and she was pregnant. (Sabier, 17/18, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town)

Playing out a dominant expression of contemporary masculinity, Sabier enacts this role of power and impregnates his girlfriend in order to keep her from other men. However, young men report that they are not alone in this practice; there are young women who engage in the same practice. Luthando (19/21, Langa, Cape Town) recounts how his girlfriend told him “she thinks that we should become parents” before he went to the *bush* [amaXhosa cultural practice of initiation into manhood] because “she loves me too much, so she was afraid that I should find another girlfriend”. Onathi elaborated confirming Luthando’s view and also believes that girls “want to get pregnant... to trap” them.

Sabier’s account illustrates how some young men choose to become fathers because of their own insecurities about their relationship. However, Sabier also demonstrates how teenage fathers’ attitudes towards pregnancy have been found to substantially influence the teenage mother – both with regard to her consent towards being impregnated, and also with regards to her attitude towards her pregnancy (Hellerstedt et al., 2001). In addition, Evans (2001) found that when considering whether to abort or proceed with the pregnancy to full term young mothers were easily swayed by the views of their baby’s young father. Themes of exclusivity, possession, and entrapment are paramount in Sabier’s reasons for his intentional fatherhood. These themes speak especially to discourses of patriarchy, power, domination and male control over women (Bourdieu, 2001; Foucault, 1994), as well as possession and ownership (Davies, 1999; Radin, 1993; Butler, 1993) as will be further illustrated below.

“I wanted a child because seeing your friend having a child, you want it too,” Andile, ironically, succumbed to existing social pressures to be a teenage father in the township. Since many young men are young fathers in lower-income communities in South Africa, fatherhood seems to carry with it enormous social meaning among boys. The status of being a young father is greater than that of being a boy with no lineage, regardless of the financial and future implications. Andile stated:

I wanted to experience life. Because we chase things that are far away from us. We broke the rule of having sex only when you’re married. There is also peer pressure seeing your friend having a child and you want it too. I decided that I was going to be a father of a child. (Andile, 20/21, Langa, Cape Town)

To be like the other young men in their neighbourhood who are young fathers, was a sentiment echoed by many young men when asked why they think young people intentionally become parents. Twenty year old Onathi, from Langa in Cape Town, empathically states, “All my friends have babies, why shouldn’t I?” Lungile (18/23, Cato Crest, Durban) agrees and says, “Others see their friends having a child and they decide that they also want to have a child”. Sifiso elaborates:

The cause of young people to become parents at a young age [pause] it is to be exposed to many things when you are still young and also [pause] being careless... And sometimes someone might see his/her friend having a child [pause] and also decides to have a child too. So it could be peer pressure. I think that is what causes young people to be parents. (Sifiso, 18/23, Bonella, Durban)

In the cases of Sakhile, Sabier and Andile it is not their family instability or weak parental relationships that places them at risk for early fatherhood, as some studies report (Fagot et al., 1998; Jaffee et al., 2001). Rather it is the way in which for many

impoverished young men, boredom and limited access to alternatives, lead them to believe that becoming a young father is desirable and the only solution to their feelings of insecurity. The fear of losing something or someone, feelings of competitiveness amongst friends and the desire to be part of the group all contribute to young men’s insecurities. However, it is young men’s community experience, not only through emulating their peers, but also with regards to the degree of violence and insecurity young men experience in impoverished communities, that seems to be the most important feature that leads them to deliberately choose young fatherhood.

“Before I die, I want to have a little one of my own.” A foreshortened view of the future, hopelessness regarding the future, or ontological insecurity within the social context of poverty in the townships of South Africa has a great influence on the decisions young men make to become fathers. These outcomes are clearly supported by the statements of a number of young men who participated in this study:

We’re exposed to everything... to drugs, we are more exposed to alcohol... to everything. ‘Cos it’s – it’s quite rare to find young people in ikasi [the township] with normal way of thinking... During the weekends... it’s either they’re drunk, or they smoked tik, dagga [methamphetamine, marijuana], everything... ‘Cos it’s the way they are brought up. It’s not the same, you see? It’s not the same. And, for example, it’s like in the suburbs... like let’s take a guy from the suburbs and take a guy from here. He gets everything he wants, so he has – there’s no problems, no worries, no anything. But at this side, you don’t get everything you want, you see? So, you go drown your sorrows in alcohol, you see?... Just to carry the stress, be okay. You end up being an alcoholic and all that. You do things, you see? (Lwethu, 18/19, Langa, Cape Town)

They want to [pause] experience it before the time... You could be younger than 20 and something could happen to you. Then you didn’t leave anything behind. People’s situations – Everyone in townships become gangsters if they leave school. This how a lot of them die. And before they die, they want to have a little one of their own... ‘Cos in our neighbourhood there’s dangerous gun shooting and there are many gangsters. Young guys, 15, 16 that have big guns and shoot at the police. [pause] They get shot dead [pause] because they don’t have a life. Their mother and father throw them away... My mother and father didn’t abandon me [pause]. My cousin became a gangster. [pause] They threatened me, had a gun to my mouth to become a gangster. (Marlin, 14 & 15/18, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town)

On speaking about why young men intentionally become fathers, Onathi believes that young men want to *experience* being a father and says, “I don’t think for guys it’s always a mistake. Some guys want to have babies. ‘I want to know how to be a father’, all that stuff”. Lwethu (18/19, Langa, Cape Town) admits, “I wanted to experience how it feels”. Young men living in poverty are insecure about their future and fear that they may not have the opportunity to have children later on in life as Xolile describes:

See, we don’t like [to] use a condom. You see. ...He doesn’t want to use the condom. Because – maybe you can ask him why you don’t want to use condom. He will say no; maybe, this is my last chance to make a baby. (Xolile, 17/24, Khayelitsha, Cape Town)

The discourse of leaving a namesake or legacy behind as soon as possible seems to be prominent in young men from impoverished communities. Is it that these young men see no attainable life goals, other than being a father, which are realistically within their reach? The level of violence and crime in their communities are so rampant that ontological insecurities are an undeniable everyday occurrence for these young men. Becoming a father could be interpreted as being a more 'masculine' choice for many of these young men than simply living sheltered or protected lives.

After the Birth of the Child — the Reality of Young Fatherhood

Although the young fathers who intentionally fathered their children attached a greater meaning to being a father than those for whom fatherhood was unintentional, the reality of being a father reflected more complex emotions. Some of the initial anticipation which led to the planned pregnancy changed to feelings of entrapment and fear of the failure to provide. Although Sabier does not regret his baby and demonstrates his love for the child, he faces similar challenges to other young fathers; that of being a child with adult responsibilities, and struggling to provide financially for the baby. In enquiring about how having a child changed his life, he replied:

Yes, yoh! It changed... the stuff that you wanted to do, like, it's gone. It is different. Like, first I could have [fun] – when she was pregnant, then she's just at home. Then I can still go on my rounds, like to my friends and that. But [now the baby is here] it's maar [only] just now [and then] I can go [out] again. So just so at night man. So after booka [supper] time, then I will go [out]. (Sabier, 17/18, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town)

However, when asked if he had known the challenges he would face as a young father, would he still have intentionally fathered a child, he replied:

You see she wasn't so, man. I would have still make a baby, but she wasn't so. Now after the baby she [the mother of his child] has changed... she can tell me now [she hasn't] man... [but] she know it. (Sabier, 17/18, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town)

Andile describes similar lifestyle changes and says:

When I didn't have a child I liked to walk around a lot. Now that I have a child I stay at home most of the time. My weekends were busy and I use to come home in the mornings but I don't do that anymore. (Andile, 20/21, Langa, Cape Town)

Although there were little to no interruptions in Sakhile's (and a few others') social activities, their financial priorities changed dramatically. Sakhile (17/19, Mayville, Durban) stated, "I do things for myself because whenever I ask for something at home they say they will only do things for my child not me". Sakhile described feeling he was of 'lower importance' and priority to his parents after the arrival of his child. Similarly, a few other young fathers describe the same experiences in their families:

When my mommy take us out for shopping then I mos know now I'm gonna get now a pair of takkies. Now – nothing like that. I don't even ask anymore for stuff. It's just – I'll just tell her what the baby need man. (Zaid, 17/18, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town)

My mother used to give me money to buy myself clothes. But now she can't. Because there is the kid and the kid

needs the money for food and the clothes. Yah, I'm suffering a lot. (Luthando, 19/21, Langa, Cape Town)

For all three groups of young men, in Langa/Khayelitsha, Bonteheuwel and Durban having a child curtailed their social activities in at least three ways. First, their weekends changed since it now included seeing their child, and if they were in a relationship with the mother of their child, visiting her as well. Second, there is a significant shift of financial responsibility from the young fathers' personal needs to his child. In most cases almost all the money that he earns or that he receives from his caregivers is used to take care of his child, sometimes leaving him feeling as if his needs are not important. These feelings, however, do not affect the young fathers love and commitment toward their children. All the young fathers in the study were positively involved with their children except for one young father that desired to be involved but was prohibited by the mother of the child.

Making Sense of Young Fatherhood, Poverty and Masculinities

The reasons that Sakhile, Sabier and Andile offer for purposely becoming a father are only partly reflected in the current literature on young fathers. The available interpretations regarding why young men choose to become young fathers circulate around young men's self-serving needs (desire fulfilment) or to impress peers (Davies et al., 2004; Miller, 1997). The literature confirms that some young men become teenage fathers because of their uncertainty of life circumstances and the presence of alcohol in the lives – leading to greater sexual risk taking and lack of condom use (Nagy & Dunn, 1999; Santelli, Robin, Brener & Lowry, 2001; Stueve & O'Donnell, 2005). In addition, the literature also points to other reasons not described by young men in this study. For example, Marsiglio (1993) found that young men with strong traditional and cultural values viewed fatherhood as evidence of fertility and masculinity. However, the two overarching themes, that this consideration of the three young men who intentionally planned to become young fathers illustrates, may be summarised as that of *ownership* and *responsibility*. Each will be discussed in turn, in light of our current understanding of African masculinities in the context of poverty.

Property ownership as a passage towards manhood. In the study, while not explicitly formulated in relation to becoming a young father, when young men were invited to speak about reasons for why they engaged in the practice of multiple, frequently concurrent, partnerships their interpretation was profound and centered around ownership. Many spoke of how their choice to be *pleyas* (sexually active with a number of girls) was one they made in contrast to choosing to be *gangstas* (criminals). Onathi (20/20, Langa, Cape Town) commented: "Being poor, I don't have possessions but I can possess lots of women".

Ownership is a key element of masculinity. Margaret Davies, drawing on Butler (1993) and Radin (1993) describes property as

a 'bundle of rights' (such as the right to use, enjoy, possess, alienate, exclude, derive income)... property also carries a particular cultural significance: the relational, mediating and dynamic side of property is often repressed in popular language, meaning that it also signifies a much more immediate, personal, sovereign power of a person over objects. (Davies, 1999, p. 328)

This theme of ‘possessing’ or ‘ownership’, with its deep significance of power, exclusion and rights, can be seen in each of the four reasons these young men offered in support of their intentional young fatherhood. Sakhile wanted to own his dream of becoming a father, and also wanted to own a “suitable” young woman in Mayville, Durban. Sabier wanted to own or possess the beauty and allegiance of his young partner, and prevent her from being owned by others in his community. Having a child with her would trap her, ensure exclusivity and ultimately ownership. For many others, Andile included, being “fashionable”, competing with others in his community or local street by also fathering a child, exhibited ownership of sorts. To be in a competition one needed to have the ‘goods’ required of a viable competitor. Similarly, to be fashionable implies ownership of the means to be fashionable. In the absence of material possessions, virility, the ability to possess a young woman, to be able to convince her to have your child, to be seen to have the goods to be both visible, fashionable and a good competitor are all ways in which poor young men can establish wealth in the absence of economic assets. Finally, when Marlin speaks of leaving a legacy, “leaving something behind”, he again implies that ownership is paramount to these young men. Usually, only the wealthy leave legacies, “make a mark”, and ensure they are remembered by future generations. For these poor young men, a child as a legacy is an important proxy for leaving legacies in the absence of property, a business or a bank account.

Hunter (2005; 2006) writes compellingly on the changes in ‘black’ Zulu men’s changed socio-economic circumstance that has robbed them of *amandla* (power) and resulted in their inability to form a household – complicated by (expensive) cultural rituals and expectations. He picks up this theme of ownership and postulates that Zulu men’s inability to afford to form households results in them adopting an alternative pathway to a display of dominant masculinity, through multiple partnerships. Although Hunter (2006, p. 101) asserts that fatherhood has lost its social value and that children are no longer seen as an asset, young men from impoverished communities still appear to place a high value on fatherhood; an acquisition easily procured. However, once ownership has been taken, the responsibilities of their new found social role introduce further complexities.

Responsibility through fatherhood, as a passage to manhood. Prior to the knowledge of their looming fatherhood, young men frequently view fatherhood as a great accomplishment. Furthermore, many assert that teenage boys do not fully understand the responsibilities of a father. Although the act of biologically fathering a child may be easy, the social role and responsibilities of a father are complex, and even more so for young men who have little to no resources or experience. These sentiments are articulated by Fadiel, who fathered two children, with two different young women, at the age of 15:

They don’t understand the risks and the consequences of what will happen. They think having a child is a joke. They don’t know it’s serious and that there is a lot of responsibility. (Fadiel, 15 & 15/17 years, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town)

Men have long been stereotyped as the ones who impregnate women and then deny paternity. However, this study found that some young men embrace their new found fatherhood and see it as an important progression towards manhood and a vehicle for becoming responsible. Vuyo (15/17, Langa, Cape Town) became a young father at 15 and said, “I feel good, very good. I’m proud. I can’t run away, because she’s my child”. Lwethu (18/19, Langa, Cape Town) but whose first child miscar-

ried when he was 17, describes his feelings on his new found fatherhood, “I wanted to experience how it feels to take care of something that is my own blood, you see. Yah, my own flesh and blood!”

Cazenave (1979) in a study of working class men showed that men ranked masculine roles in the following order: provider, husband, father and worker. A young man, under the age of 18, living in a poverty-stricken community does not possess the resources to be a provider, cannot afford the *ilobolo* to be a husband, and in the South African context of unemployment, is not easily able to be a worker. However, becoming a father and thus acquiring responsibility seems like the only way to assert his manhood. Fadiel (15 & 15/17, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town) states, “I have responsibilities now. All I think about is how I can provide for my children”. Society has stereotypically given the label of ‘a man’ to men who provide for their families. Many caregivers on hearing the news of their son’s early transition into fatherhood, immediately stress the importance of him being a man and taking care of his responsibilities, as Yusuf relates:

No, they [my parents] were not angry. They just knocked some sense into me. They told me that I am a man now, so I must find a job because they can’t support me and the baby... I didn’t finish [school]. I dropped out in Grade 10 because the baby came and I had to go and find a job and be responsible. (Yusuf, 16/21, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town)

This empowerment that young men feel upon becoming men through ‘taking responsibility’ and becoming a father, is quickly turned to feelings of confusion and disempowerment as they realize their *inability* to provide for the child. Jabu tells of his conflicting entrance into young fatherhood. Although he is the father of the child, his culture does not allow him the privileges of having an opinion in the negotiations or decisions regarding his child, as he had not performed the cultural rite of passage resulting in manhood (penile circumcision and solitude):

I was very afraid. You see, when you’re like, you are 18, you’re still – you’re still young to them. Yes, and they were asking like how am I going to take care of it [the baby]. How am I going to buy things for the baby, because I was still at school... My uncles did pay, but they did not pay all the amount. My uncles – they said I need to take responsibility. (Jabu, 18/22, Khayelitsha, Cape Town)

In amaXhosa culture when a boy undergoes initiation and comes back a man, he may not be expected to deal with all the responsibilities of a man at once. However, when a teenage boy becomes a young father, although not the traditional passage into manhood, he immediately faces the challenges of a man. This includes providing for his child’s immediate needs by finding work, which in most cases, is only possible by dropping out of school. Inevitably, whether the young man is prepared for fatherhood or not, society expects him to exercise the prescribed masculine roles of provision and care for his child. It is this that challenges these young fathers the most: whilst still little more than a child himself, being faced with the demands of manhood and fatherhood, with few resources and no preparation. This challenge is even more frustrating because while becoming a father may be a shortcut to manhood, it is only through taking financial responsibility that you remain one. Faced with the inevitable lack of ability to provide, fatherhood thus becomes a source of emasculation.

Limitations of the Study

There are, of course, limitations in this study that should be taken into account. First, the sample was biased toward participants who were generally pleased with fatherhood, had not denied paternity, and had high levels of involvement with their offspring. Second, due to the small sample size and qualitative nature of this study, findings are not statistically representative and therefore cannot be generalized. However, it is clear that the young fathers who participated in the study represent the diversity of impoverished young men in South Africa and therefore this study offers guidance for future qualitative and quantitative research.

Conclusion

Three out of the 27 young men in this study purposely, deliberately and intentionally fathered their children. Although all the study's participants welcomed their children into their lives, the challenges they face are similar, whether the pregnancy was intentional or not. This study highlights that some young men choose to become fathers because of relationship insecurities, peer influences, and ontological insecurities, and that these reasons are driven, in some fashion, by poverty and a drive for alternate pathways to express dominant masculinities. However, this study only hints at the many complex factors in operation in these constructions of masculinity. Future research into the social construction of masculinity, within culture, and through fatherhood, for teenage boys is needed to understand further the role of *intentional* fatherhood. In all the cases of intentional fatherhood in this study, the young women agreed to become pregnant, thus drawing our attention to the acquiescence of teenage girls when engaging in unprotected sex with their partners. Future research is needed here also to further examine the dynamics of the relationship between young women and young men.

Additionally, this study suggests the desire for ownership and responsibility as risk factors for intentional teenage fatherhood. This is especially evident for youth who live in the context of poverty, and in communities that do not adequately provide for the holistic development of young people. Ownership, whether of a partner or a child, can be seen in the light of perpetuating hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995) through formulating a sense of masculinity in a context that is devoid of ownership possibilities through conventional means. But fatherhood as ownership may also be seen as an alternate pathway (Davies, 1999) to meeting masculine needs for unattainable desires for property. Furthermore, fatherhood as ownership, while problematic on one hand, has the possibility for reinforcing the notion of 'responsibility' in the discussion of the construction of masculinity within impoverished contexts. These notions of ownership and responsibility offer fruitful avenues for ongoing research into what it means to be young, poor and a father while simultaneously negotiating a masculine identity in South Africa.

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Endnotes

¹ Racial terminology is problematic in South Africa. When we refer to 'racial' descriptors, such as 'black' and 'coloured' we enclose it in inverted commas. This is done to convey the artificiality of the concept of 'race' and the associated terms of 'black', 'white', 'coloured' and 'Indian'. These concepts are not biologically fixed, rather they refer to the legacy of the Apartheid system of racial classification as defined by the South African Population Registration Act of 1950. Currently in South Africa, it remains standard practice to use these (or other) descriptors in order to call attention to continuing inequalities and their effects. Some use 'African' or 'black African' instead of 'black', while some capitalise both terms; yet others use 'black' to include people described as 'coloured'. Our use of these terms is pragmatic, is used for descriptive purposes and does not imply endorsement of any of these classifications.

² This means that 47.1% of the South African population live below the 'upper bound' poverty line of R593 per capita per month as defined by Statistics South Africa in 2008 and reported in Armstrong, Lekezwa and Siebrits. By 'race' group the proportion of those who are poor is: 'black' 93.3%, 'coloured' 6.3%, 'Indian' 0.4% and 'white' 0.1% (Armstrong et al., 2008, p. 12).

³ Sturgess, Dunn and Davies' (2001) fourth circle represented those with whom participants had a particularly negative relationship. We omitted this circle preferring to keep the activity open-ended and less directive. In any event young men told us of negative relationships and placed individuals with whom they had negative relationships outside the three concentric circles, in effect drawing their own fourth field.

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