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Becoming a Teenage Father : Having a Baby as a Turning Point in Biographies of Young Men of Low Socioeconomic Status Inhabiting Poverty Enclaves

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Abstract The paper reflects on the impact of fatherhood on lives of young men, brought up in multiproblem families in poverty enclaves in a post-industrial city, namely Lodz. Empirical grounds of the text are 27 biographical interviews carried out within a research module of the WZLOT project (full project title: “Strengthening Opportunities and Weakening Transmission of Poverty among Inhabitants of Towns of the Lodz Province”) with young men who had become fathers as teenagers. The interviewees had been school dropouts, in conflict with the law, with problems of substance abuse. The paper attempts to reconstruct the process of becoming a father in the case of young men lacking father figures themselves and whose fatherhood was often being questioned because of their low socioeconomic status.

Keywords fatherhood, turning point, transformation, teenage parenthood, poverty

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Introduction

“Researchers disproportionately study mothers” (Dowd 2000:22) and so it is usually motherhood analyzed as a “turning point” (Budrowska 2000) or “critical event” in life (Kuryś 2010). As the model of fatherhood has been evolving and so has the role, position and duties of a man within a family, it seems reasonable to look at the way having a child results also for men. Studies on parenthood and parenting primarily focus on motherhood and

the consequences of having a baby for women. Research on families and family roles seem mostly middle-class oriented. Also, studies on early (teenage) parenthood are mainly studies on early (teenage) motherhood. The aim of the article is to reflect on the process of change in biographies of young men of low socioeconomic status brought up in so-called "poverty enclaves" who became fathers as teenagers. Empirical grounds of the analysis are 27 qualitative interviews that were part of the research on teenage parenthood as a risk of poverty and social exclusion conducted within the framework of "Strengthening Opportunities and Weakening the Processes of Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty among the Inhabitants of the Cities of the Lodz Province – WZLOT" project. Theoretical framework for the analysis is the concept of transformation and identity change by Anselm L. Strauss (2009).

Changing Models of Fatherhood

Parenthood undergoes socio-cultural changes and trends and so do expectations and constructions of fatherhood (Dowd 2000:40). As Anna Kwak puts it, "(...) being a parent is situated in time and space. It is integrally linked to and shaped by historical events, demographic changes, cultural norms and values, stratification systems, alterations in social structure, development of family and its organization. Depending on social and historical context, the way parenthood is being practiced changes" (Kwak 2008: 29-30, translation PBM). Indeed, much has changed since Talcott Parsons described family as a set of expressive and instrumental roles, wherein father secures the latter such as breadwinning, leadership and status provision. In structural-functional theory father

is generally responsible for the development of social elements of the child's personality and therefore plays no or minimal role in early stages of the child upbringing process whereas later on he serves as an embodiment of "superego" (in the Freudian sense) (Parsons 1969, after: Kotlarska-Michalska 2010:35-36). Along with the widely discussed changes in structure, role, size and character of modern family (for instance Tyszka 2001; Ogryzko-Wiewiórkowska 2001; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Krzyszkowski 2001; Slany 2002; Tyszka 2002; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2004; Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004; Kwak 2005; Kwak 2014), parenthood has also been evolving¹. According to Nancy Dowd, we witness "a major transformation in the conception of fatherhood in a relatively short period of time" (Dowd 2000:40). As a result, right next to the "new mother" and "the new baby" there is the "new father" (Sikorska 2009; Szlendak 2010): not only a provider, but an every-day companion, emotionally bound to his children, responsive to their needs, ready and happy to spend time with them (Sikorska 2009:146-193).

The traditional, patriarchal and still dominant mode of fatherhood "involves minimal or no caretaking of children and is being epitomized by the system of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate children and linking the payment of money to entitlement to a social relationship" (Dowd 2000:214). The "new", social, nurturing fatherhood is an opposition to the traditional one and involves "significant involvement of men in the nurture of their children" (Dowd 2000:22). Polish literature on fatherhood

¹ According to Elisabeth Badinter (1993), due to the recent end of patriarchy fatherhood underwent not an evolution, but a revolution (Badinter 1993: 148-149).

distinguishes two contrary models of being a father (Arcimowicz 2008). The first one is based on the concept of traditional masculinity and assumes that: (1) father is the breadwinner and, preoccupied with his provision duties, he does not participate much in the children's care, nurture, up-bringing, (2) father is the family leader; he makes the most important decision, dominates other family members, (3) father has a "natural" authority over children and uses different (more decisive) parenting methods than mother does: he is serious, severe, demands obedience and respect. The second model of being a father available today in Polish society is rooted in the new masculinity paradigm. The "new" father accompanies his baby's mother in pregnancy and labor, provides care and nursing to his children, shows them and explains to them what is right instead of punishing them for what is wrong (Arcimowicz 2008:124-145). The "new" father "is there" for his children and their mother. According to researchers, the traditional fatherhood still dominates in Poland, although the "new" fatherhood becomes more and more common (Arcimowicz 2008; Kubicki 2009). "New fathers" experience positive effects of their engagement in the family life, such as work-related stress reduction, good relationships with their offspring, high level of satisfaction in life (Szlendak 2009:69). At the same time, the "new fathers" are being overwhelmed with responsibilities since the new familial tasks have been added to the traditional ones: men are still the main family providers (whereas women are still primary caregivers). Therefore, contemporary men are described as disoriented, unsure, helpless and stressed in the way they perform the role of the "new father" (Szlendak 2009:69; Bakiera 2013; Bieńko 2008; Kluczyń-

ska 2008). Still, "[m]odern fathering is no longer just procreation and bill paying [...] Becoming a father means reordering priorities and making commitment to physically and emotionally care for children" (Coltrane 1996:5).

Despite a growing number of publications on "new parents" ("new fathers" among them), it seems that little is known about parenthood, and especially about fatherhood by parents of low education and income (Szlendak 2003; Roter 2005; Biedroń 2006). Polish authors seem to concentrate on middle class and big city families.² Parenting in families of low socioeconomic status is usually being discussed in the context of difficult or crisis situations, support need, dysfunction or "pathology" (for instance, Badora, Czeredrecka, Marzec 2001; Biała 2006; Sakowicz 2006; Stojcka-Zuber, Róg 2007; Hurło 2010; Nowak 2011; Olszewska 2012; Badora, Basiaga 2012).³

Invisible, Demonized, Minimal – Fatherhood of Teenage Fathers

Teenage fathers are almost "invisible" in social research (Shields, Pierce 2006:142). As a narrative therapist working with teenage fathers David Nylund

² For example, in the book titled "Modern Polish families – condition and direction of change" edited by Zbigniew Tyszka, there are articles on "Models of family life of middle class" (Wachowiak, Frątczak 2001), "Middle-class families in changing reality" (Leszkowicz-Baczyńska 2001), "Family life patterns of urban family" (Żurek 2001), "Children's education to work in urban family" (Pielka 2001), "Marriage model of large city family" (Budzyńska 2001), "Situation of a child in high economic status family" (Marzec 2001).

³ More about teenage fatherhood in poverty enclaves in the light of the "new fatherhood" concept in: Bunio-Mroczek P., *Być nastoletnim ojcem w łódzkiej enklawie biedy. Rodzicielstwo młodych mężczyzn o niskim statusie społeczno-ekonomicznym w świetle koncepcji „nowego ojcostwa”* (under review in: "Wychowanie w rodzinie", in Polish).

puts it, “[t]he study on teen parenthood has become almost synonymous with the study of teen moms, [whereas] little attention has been devoted to the study on teen fathers” (Nylund 2006:159).⁴

If teenage fatherhood does become a subject of academic interests, the results oftentimes “demonize” the young fathers who “do not conform to the traditional, married, breadwinner role” (Speak 2006:149). According to Susan Speak, the negative image of a teenage father comes from traditional gendered perception of family roles. “Economic” fatherhood means obligation to earn money and support one’s children financially. If a man is not economically ready to become a father, he is deprived of a right to be a father in general (Speak 2006:149). According to D. Nylund, under-involvement of teenage fathers with their children results from internalization of patriarchal ideas of parenting. A “narrow” definition of masculinity (referring mostly to economic achievements and occupational status) makes men pay the price of shallow relationships (with their children, with their partners), and in case of very young fathers condemns them to “minimal fathering” (Nylund 2006:159-163). Another stereotypical idea about very young fathers is that they are irresponsible and leave their female partners as soon as they find out about the pregnancy or right after the baby is born. Some research shows that even if they do not get married or cohabit, teenage fathers often form stable, long-lasting informal relationships with their children’s mothers. Also, young mothers are

⁴ “The research on teenage pregnancy has focused almost exclusively on young women, both in terms of pregnancy prevention and child rearing. Fathers have been assumed to be irresponsible” (Dowd 2000:70).

equally likely to break up a relationship as young fathers are, as they are searching for more economically attractive partners to bring up their children with (Speak 2006:151).

Young (and especially underage) men who become fathers may face many difficulties in fulfilling their parental role. “External” barriers to fathering for teenage fathers may turn out to be (Speak 2006:152-155):

1. the legal system – depending on regulations, the fact that young parents are not married, and especially the fact that a young father is underage, may mean he has no legal right to his baby and as a result he is not a father in the sight of the law⁵;
2. parents of the mother of a child – who may show a hostile attitude to teenage fathers and be reluctant to his involvement in the life of their grandchild, especially if he is not willing to marry their daughter and/or if he has a criminal record;
3. educational policy – usually there are some forms of support for pregnant and mothering students (different depending on a country and social policy regulations), whereas teenage fathers are not offered any institutionalized support at school;
4. “professional helpers” – such as school pedagogues or social service workers who may

⁵ In Poland a male under 18 years of age is not permitted to get married under any condition (*the Polish Civil Code*, articles 10 and 11). If the mother of a child of an underage father is also a minor, he cannot become a father in the sight of the law: as she is not an adult, she is not in the position to indicate the father. A baby of underage parents must have a legal guardian appointed by family court until the mother reaches 18 years of age.

discourage young mothers from continuing a relationship with a teenage father.

Family Formation as a Turning Point in Biography

According to A.L. Strauss, identity is a person's definition (Hałas 2013:XXVI). This definition undergoes changes in the course of life. The moment evoking identity change is a turning point.

A.L. Strauss undermines the idea of development as a linear process (he uses a metaphor of a runner's path where one needs to get from the start to the finishing line and a metaphor of an uncooked egg which at a certain moment will be ready to describe what development is not, Strauss 2009): "Presumably [the concept of development] refers to a progressive movement wherein the beginning, middle, and end bear some discernible relationship to each other. But, the notion of development is a trap for the unwary and a battleground for some centuries of philosophic contention" (Strauss 2009:91-92). To the author, development means a series of related transformations (Strauss 2009:93).

Transformation happens when a person realizes that "I am not the same as I was, as I used to be" (Strauss 2009:95) as a result of a critical incident that has occurred. Such critical moments are turning points in biographies, which lead to creation of new identities (Strauss 2009:95). As A.L. Strauss puts it, "[s]ome transformations of identity are planned, or at least fostered, by institutional representatives; others happen despite, rather than

because of, such regulated anticipation (Strauss 2009:94). Turning points are frequently related to "misalignment - surprise, shock, chagrin, anxiety, tension, bafflement, self-questioning" (Strauss 2009:95). They could be both thrilling and dreadful; they pose a challenge providing an opportunity to "try out the new self", they are also the moments when a person is forced to revise and evaluate one's achievements (Strauss 2009:95, 101-102).

Turning points offer a chance for a passage of status: "[...] the movement from status to status, as well as the frustration of having to remain unwillingly in a status, sets conditions for the change and development of identities" (Strauss 2009:111). Passages of status are mostly highly institutionalized (Strauss 2009:103). The movement from status to status is regularized, and there are predecessors and successors ("People have been there and will follow you", Strauss 2009:103). The predecessors may become transformation guides: "When passages of status are more or less well-regulated, those who have gone through the recognized steps stand ready [...] to guide and advise their successors. This guidance is essential, for even regulated passage is [hazardous]" (Strauss 2009:111). According to A.L. Strauss, "The lives of men and women can – theoretically at least – be traced as a series of passages of status" (Strauss 2009:111). This concept appeals not only to occupational life but this is "a way of looking at adult development" in general (Strauss 2009:111).

Having one's first baby is often referred to in literature (usually within the developmental psychology, but also sociological studies) as a milestone,

a turning point, a (critical/stressful/readjustment) life event. Becoming a parent is presented as a burdening and overwhelming life course phase, which however provokes personal growth and demands activation of coping responses (Budrowska 2000; Kuryś 2010). Expecting and the birth of the first child play the key role in parents' biographies. They are circumstances that make individuals give up some activities and take up new ones. Also, they require (sometimes radical) change of one's values and beliefs (Kuryś 2010:33-34).

Having a baby demands taking up new roles and gaining new competences. It is an experience which stimulates development in the period of early adulthood and transforms the way young adults live and who young adults are (Kuryś 2010:7). Pregnancy and the newborn child introduces changes not only in lives of individual men and women, but also influence the family system they constitute (Kuryś 2010:8). Even people and couples who plan and expect having their first baby, usually go through serious crises and experience severe hardships adjusting to being parents (Kuryś 2010:8). The situation is even more difficult when the pregnancy is unexpected, the baby was not planned and a parent (or both parents) due to their young age and poor socioeconomic background is/are considered not mature enough to form a family.

Teenage Parenthood – a Risk or an Opportunity?

Teenage parents are usually young people brought up in low socioeconomic status, multiproblem families. Factors associated with early child bear-

ing can be divided into the following groups (Imamura et al. 2006:35-46)⁶:

1. Sociodemographic factors – such as socioeconomically disadvantaged background, persistent financial difficulties throughout childhood, parental economic status deteriorated during childhood; residence in more deprived neighborhood, immigrant status, early physical development.
2. Factors related to family structure and stability - having lived in a single parent family during childhood; living in a stepfamily or a lone father family; parents' divorce; maternal death; having a large number of siblings, having a mother with little interest in her child's education; a decline in maternal interest in education from childhood through to adolescence; low level of parental education, early father's school leaving age; experience of child sexual abuse; extreme cases of parental alcohol misuse.
3. Educational factors - poor academic ability; leaving full-time schooling at the minimum age; early school leaving; low education level; negative attitude to school; low educational aspiration.
4. Psychosocial factors - behavioral and emotional problems; difficult parent-child relationship; teacher-rated antisocial behavior (aggression,

⁶ REPROSTAT 2 (*Reproductive Health Indicators in the European Union*) international research project was aimed at identifying teenage parenthood risk factors (early pregnancy, early child birth, early sexual initiation, contraception use, knowledge on family planning methods) in 25 EU countries. 4444 results of research on teenage parenthood were gathered, out of which 57 were thoroughly analyzed. Risk factors were identified at individual levels (Imamura et al. 2006).

disruptiveness and truancy); having started smoking regularly at age 13 or younger.

5. Factors related to sexual knowledge, attitudes and behavior - early sexual initiation; showing a preference for early parenthood; positive attitudes to early marriage.^{7,8}

In teenage parenthood studies there are two dominant discourses on the “results” of early child-bearing wherein teenage parenthood is presented either as a “risk” or as an “opportunity”. The “risk discourse”, mostly based on quantitative studies with participation of women only, stresses negative consequences of early family formation. Having a baby as a teenager constitutes a threat of strengthening poverty and social exclusion for the young parents and a risk of intergenerational transmission of low socioeconomic status. The negative outputs of early parenthood are: low educational attainment, poor housing conditions, low employment level, low (both individual and family) income level (Hoffman et al. 1993, Ribar 1999, Wellings et al. 1999, after: Berthoud, Robson 2001:1). The likelihood of becoming a social welfare client and of being employed in the least-paid sectors of labor market grows; whereas chances of getting married and having good job qualifications

⁷ Another group of factors was identified: factors related to sexual education. However, results in this area are contradictory (Imamura et al. 2006:46).

⁸ As it was already mentioned, most studies on teenage parenthood involve teenage mothers. Most of the above-cited factors were identified in studies on teenage motherhood; only some refer to fathers. However, according to a British researcher, Lisa Arai, sociodemographic characteristics of teenage mothers and fathers are very similar. Also, if a young father stays in close relationship with his child and takes up the role of the father on an every-day basis, the consequences of early child bearing are the same for men as for women. (Arai 2009a:34-35).

drop for those who become parents before turning 20 years of age (UNICEF 2001): As John Ermisch puts it, “(...) having a child as a teenager disrupts [teenage mother’s] human capital investment, by causing her to curtail her formal education and by keeping her out of employment for a time, thereby depriving her of valuable work experience” (Ermisch 2003:1).

The academic discourse of teenage parenthood, as an “opportunity” is constructed by critically oriented authors who use mostly qualitative methods and attempt to include not only young mothers but also teenage fathers into their studies. Results of their research, except for hardships young parents experience, show that there are also positive “consequences” of early child bearing, such as: the growth of competencies, skills, self-esteem; improvement in general well-being; changes in behaviors and habits (working one’s way out of addictions, going back to school, searching for a job, taking up vocational training and employment, giving up peer groups of bad influence); change of aspirations (especially growth of economic aspirations); rise of social status; recovery of family relationships (with parents, grandparents, siblings); formation of positive identity; reaching maturity and adulthood; gaining a meaning in life empowerment (Music 1993; Graham, McDermott 2006; Duncan 2007; Arai 2009a Arai 2009b).⁹

⁹ More about perspectives in teenage parenthood research in: Bunio-Mroczek Paulina. 2014. “Nastoletnie macierzyństwo - zagrożenie wykluczeniem społecznym czy szansa na integrację społeczną? Kontrowersje teoretyczne i podejścia praktyczne.” Pp. 97-111 in *Wykluczenie i marginalizacja dzieci i młodzieży – wyzwanie czy klęska społeczeństwa obywatelskiego* edited by A. Golczyńska-Grondas, M. Nózka (ed.), Acta Universitatis Lodzensis Folia Sociologica 49, Lodz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

Empirical Grounds and Sample Characteristic

The paper is based on a study carried out in Lodz within the framework of a research project named “Strengthening Opportunities and Weakening Transmission of Poverty among Inhabitants of Towns of the Lodz Province”.¹⁰ One of the project’s research modules was focused on poor families of teenage parents inhabiting Lodz poverty pockets. Empirical study¹¹ encompassed in-depth biographical interviews with men and women whose first child was born before they reached the age of 20. The interviewees inhabited urban areas of concentrated poverty, so-called “enclaves of poverty”¹²

¹⁰ This policy-oriented project was coordinated by Prof. Wiesława Warzywoda Kruszyńska and carried out by a team of researchers from the Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work of the Institute of Sociology of the University of Lodz in cooperation with the Institute of Social Initiatives Foundation. The project was financed by the European Social Fund within the framework of the Human Capital Operational Program 2007-2013, under priority 7 – “Promotion of social integration”. The main project’s objective was to support social inclusion in the region of Lodz by producing knowledge on mechanisms of social exclusion and by providing knowledge-based solutions to overcome the exclusion to be implemented by social policy subjects. More information about the project can be found at www.wzlot.uni.lodz.pl (in Polish).

¹¹ Field work was carried out in Lodz from October 2008 to February 2009.

¹² Lodz poverty enclaves are the city areas with a relatively high proportion of inhabitants who experience poverty (defined as being a member of a household supported by social welfare). The poverty enclaves were identified and have been studied by a team of sociologists from the University of Lodz led by Prof. Wiesława Warzywoda-Kruszyńska. Maps of poverty in Lodz were prepared for the first time in 1998, when a poverty enclave was defined as at least two neighboring quarters inhabited by at least 30% and at least 40% of social welfare clients. A decade later different methodology was used to draw up a poverty map: poverty enclave was a district of primary school where high proportions of pupils received free meals within the national program “State’s support in food provision” (“Pomoc państwa w zakresie dożywiania”). Areas of the “old” and the “new” poverty enclaves overlap to a big extent, which means that poverty has been petrified. The poverty enclaves in Lodz are situated in the vast center of the city (tenement houses from

and were supported by welfare institutions in the form of child allowance and welfare benefits, provided in Poland to members of households of very low income. The article is based on empirical data collected during biographical in-depth interviews with 27 young fathers inhabiting Lodz poverty enclaves. Most of the interviews were conducted in places where narrator’s lived at that time. The interviews lasted from 1 to 2,5 hours. They were all recorded, transcribed and analyzed with the use of NVivo 7 and NVivo 9 software. All the interviewed men had become fathers before they turned 20 years of age. Research participants were adults at the time the research was done,¹³ usually in their early twenties. The largest share of respondents (16 out of 27) belonged to the 20-24 age group; six of the interviewed men were between 25 and 29 years old, 5 of the narrators were 19 and less. Most of the research participants (16 out of 27) had their first baby when they were 19 years old, 7 of

the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, old workers’ housing estates built by factory owners). Nowadays these areas gradually undergo the processes of revitalization and gentrification. Early parenting is a common pattern of family formation among poor inhabitants of poverty (Szczepański, M.S. and W. Ślęzak-Tazbir “Między lękiem a podziwem: getta społeczne w starym regionie przemysłowym.” Pp. 29-52 in *Gettoizacja polskiej przestrzeni miejskiej*, edited by B. Jałowiecki, W. Łukowski. Warsaw 2007; Grotowska-Leder, J. “Enklawy biedy jako przedmiot socjologii ubóstwa – aspekty teoretyczne i empiryczne.” Pp. 149-173 in *Enklawy życia społecznego. Kontynuacje* edited by L. Gołdyka, I. Machaj, Szczecin 2009; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, W. “Od badań nad biedą do badań nad procesem dziedziczenia biedy – łódzka szkoła badań nad biedą i pomocą społeczną i jej rezultaty” *Praca Socjalna* special issue July-August 2010:5-20; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, W. “Enklawy biedy – mechanizm powstawania i trwania” *Praca Socjalna* special issue July-August 2010:51-60; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, W. “Wielkomiejska bieda.” Pp. 139-162 in *Polska bieda w świetle Europejskiego Roku Walki z Ubóstwem i Wykluczeniem Społecznym*, edited by H.E. Kubiak, Cracow 2012).

¹³ Except for one 17-year-old ward of Youth Sociotherapy Center. In his case, the interview took place in the institution, with permission of the interviewee’s tutors (and of course with his own permission).

them – when they were 18, three – when they were 17, one – at the age of 15. The eldest (first) children of the respondents were from a couple of months up to almost 10 years old. Most of the narrators (13 out of 27) had one child at the time the research was done. Eight men had two children, three interviewees – three children, one (aged 25) – four children, and one (aged 24) – five children. Almost all of the research participants (25 out of 27) were in a relationship with a mother of their children at the time of the interview. Seven men were married, the others (18 out of 27) were in informal relationships, involving living together (except for one interviewee, who lived apart from his partner and children, but were in regular contact with them). Two men, who had broken up with the mothers of their children, were single.¹⁴

It must be stressed that the discussed research involved purposive sampling. The population under research is not representative for the population of teenage fathers from poverty enclaves in general. Research participants consisted of a specific group of young fathers: all of them decided to fulfill the father's role and either lived with their children (24 out of 27 research participants), or had a frequent and regular contact with them (3 out of 27 interviewees¹⁵).

¹⁴ In the case of the first single father, the child lived with the (underage) mother and her parents; in case of the second one – family court deprived the mother of her parental rights and so the single father took care of the child supported by his mother and sisters.

¹⁵ However, the interviewed fathers were not always officially family (household) members. In cases of couples who were not formally married, female partners of the research participants were officially "single mothers" for the social service record.

Before Fathering – Childhood and Adolescence

Early biographies of the interviewed young fathers are similar. They were brought up in poor, usually multichildren families supported by social welfare, often affected by child neglect and interfamily violence, with at least one adult family member having a drinking problem. In some families "only" a father or a mother's new partner overused alcohol: "[...] my mom was sick, had a disability. It wasn't easy, my father drank heavily, sometimes we had to flee from home. But, my mom somehow got along with it. My father would spend all his wage on booze, so she had to support us herself" (O.25).¹⁶ In other families both parents drank too much: "I lived with my mom and dad. Mom and dad drank alcohol. I had poor living conditions because we all lived in one room [...]. They [the parents] would get into terrible fights, sometimes we would not let the father in, he would sleep in the staircase" (O.57). In some cases, social services intervened and young boys were put into foster care: "I had a difficult childhood. My father was drinking. He had a criminal record. My mom was also a drinker. Dad went to jail and mom started drinking. Neighbors called, the social worker came and took us. I was in a chil-

¹⁶ In the empirical part of the article fragments of respondents' statements are cited. They are translated from Polish into English in such a way that they should give a true sense of what the research participants wanted to communicate. Interviewees did not speak perfect Polish as far as grammar and vocabulary is concerned but I did not attempt to present their language mistakes in the English translation. However, I tried to keep the unofficial character of the way they spoke. Also, I tried to capture those language structures/constructs which, in my opinion, might have been meaningful. For instance, when a respondent said "Her father wanted to abort the baby" I did not correct his words into "Her father wanted her to have an abortion" or "Her father wanted the pregnancy to be terminated."

dren's home until I was 19, with my sister" (O.73). Foster care usually meant going through many subsequent foster care families and institutions: "I was raised by my mother with a 3-year-old brother. Until I was nine I had been living at home, then I was in different places [...] I spent a year in an emergency foster care unit, with quite a nice family... But, then I was moved to S. [name of a town] to a children's home. I ran away from there, I couldn't find my way there, there was violence and stuff... [...] I came here [to the Youth Sociotherapy Center] because my brother was here. I knew a social worker here and he made me stay, go to school here [...]. I've been living [in a foster family established by one of the teachers from Youth Sociotherapy Center] for a year and a half" (O.54).

Another loss experience shared by some of the interviewees was the death of one or more of the closest relatives: "My childhood wasn't happy. You know, I'm not from a rich family. My parents drank... you know, alcohol. When I was 11 my mother died. Then my father passed away. Couple of years ago my brother hung himself in front of me. Then my grandparents died. I was alone" (O.78). Sometimes older siblings took over parental roles and duties from irresponsible and/or absent biological parents: "At the beginning [of my life] I was with my parents; later on my sister raised me, since I was nine" (O.87). Some of the interviewed men themselves took care over their younger siblings in times of family crises: "My father was hiding from the police because they were going after him, somewhere in the countryside, so it was a relief for us, but then mom started drinking a lot again so I was staying with the kids and all we did was sit at home" (O.75).

Except for alcohol overuse and violence by their parents, the narrators were experiencing poverty. One interviewee recalled he "would rather spend time in kindergarten than at home because there were toys, a lot of toys, and kids to play with, and I did not have that at home" (O.75).

Some men kept positive memories of their family and childhood: "[It was] normal. Everything was ok. I lived with my mom, my dad. I would go to kindergarten. No problems at all" (O.72). At some point, however, the good times would end: "It was alright... It was alright as long as dad was sober" (O.81); "Dad... he worked in many places. He taught me many things, we were doing stuff together. As time went by, I remember, when I was older...he started drinking, drinking too much" (O.82). A group of respondents had not lived in a poverty enclave in their early years. They describe their childhood as happy: "I had a normal, positive childhood, with my parents. We lived in a totally different place. There, there weren't these kind of problems [as there are here, in the poverty enclave]. It was alright. My parents had jobs, they were working, my grandma used to come to visit us" (O.89). Respondents who had spent their childhood in other parts of the city moved into the poverty enclave as adolescents, when they were about 14-16 years of age: "So my dad died and we lost that apartment. We had to think of something else and this is how we ended up in this tenement house" (O.72). Moving into a poverty enclave was usually the moment when problems began or became more apparent than they used to be: "We had lived in a block of flats, but my parents couldn't pay the rent, those apartments are expensive, and so we moved, the apartment here

was larger and it was in a tenement house. And everything changed. My dad had this accident. My mom began to drink. Dad was hiding and they took the kids [siblings] away" (O.75). "There came a time when my father lost his job. This situation made us give up the apartment in a block of flats, as our debts were increasing. My mom was working in a school but her salary wasn't enough. We moved here. And here... it all has started here. I met different people. From a different world, you might say. A little bit... more experienced in life" (O.83).

Life-course patterns of the research participants included early school leaving, getting in conflict with the law (not in all cases, but most of the respondents were involved in activities that actually could have made them get in conflict with the law), in some cases custody/arrest, a suspended sentence, court supervision and probation. All of the interviewed men abused substances, some very intensively.

The interviewees had experienced severe learning problems and hardships in the school environment in general. Some of them were not doing well at school from the very beginning of their educational track: "I was never interested in learning. Since I was little, I always had conflicts at school. I had no affection for school whatsoever. I did not want to learn" (O.73). Some were doing fine at school at the beginning of their education, but in their adolescence the companion of peers became more attractive than anything else: "I finished primary school with distinction [...] but after that, I didn't get any more rewards [...] You know, friends, marijuana, alcohol, this was important to me, not school" (O.10). The majority of the interviewed men had not

finished gymnasium¹⁷: "In gymnasium... first addictions such as cigarettes, beer... and skipping classes [...] I failed the first grade [of gymnasium, where students are supposed to be about 14 years old], I had to repeat a year. In the second grade – the same situation, the same problem. In the third grade I was expelled" (O.89). In the lives of the narrators, usually no later than in the last grades of primary school, peer groups became the most important reference point. Male friends they would drink, smoke and play truant with are a part of the "neighborhood effect" in a poverty pocket, where positive examples of those who stayed at school which led to success in life are missing. Also, parents of the respondents had not encouraged them to study. Mothers were too busy trying to make ends meet: "Nobody watched me, my mom [being a single parent] wasn't able to deal with all the problems herself [...] She had to go to work at 6 a.m. and of course I wouldn't get up [to go to school], I'd sleep as long as I wanted. When I knew she would be back soon, only then I would get up and go out [pretending I went to school]" (O.73). Other parents did not care about educational achievements of their children: "My mom would rather have fun instead of taking care of us. There wasn't anyone to tell me to go to school" (O.75).

Part of the respondents proved to be "demoralized" as their probation officers would call it; or were involved in criminal activities. As a result, many of the interviewees went through institutions such as youth educational centers, special training and education centers reformatories, arrests, some had been

¹⁷ Gymnasium in the Polish educational system is a lower secondary school for children aged 13-16; education in gymnasium lasts for 3 years.

to prisons. Part of the interviewed men had suspended sentences and were on probation. If they repeated the offence they had been sentenced for, they would go to jail. Stories told by those narrators who decided to openly describe their criminal past show they were captured and judged for only a fraction of the crimes they had committed. Their illegal activities were of different kinds. Some were thefts, stealing minor things like women's handbags in the street and more expensive goods such as luxurious cars: "They caught me stealing a car. I got three years in suspension" (O.76). The others were drunk-driving, selling stolen goods, dealing drugs,¹⁸ taking part in fights and robberies. One of the respondents was sentenced for an assault with the use of a dangerous tool. He expected he would get away scot-free because he had had an accident with a head-injury. He thought that would make him "insane" in the eyes of a judge: "I stabbed this cheat, he was playing with me... I thought they wouldn't do anything to me [because of the head injury]. If I wanted to kill him, I would... damn, I would take a bigger knife! But I stabbed him with this god dammed penknife, paperknife, and... eight months [in jail]" (O.82).

The rehabilitation process some of the interviewed men underwent had different results than assumed. For example, one of the respondents, who had three suspended sentences (for theft, robbery and drunk-driving) and did not pay the awarded fine, was imprisoned for 2 weeks. It had no crime-detering effect for him; he recalled the time spent in jail as very pleasant: "I had a great time [laughter]. I met a friend [a neighbor from where he used to live

¹⁸ None of the respondents talked about drug dealing out loud, it was suggested between the lines.

as a child] in a cell. It was cool. I played cards and ate decent dinners for two weeks, that's all" (O.10). Another narrator went to a special education and training center for demoralized male youth. There he made friends with people who pulled him into the criminal world: "That's were all my 'connections' come from. After I got used to this place they even started to like me and we began doing business together" (O.76). Another research participant simply run away from an institution for deprived youth and came back home. He was never found and never got back to the center (O.50).

All of the research participants used alcohol¹⁹ and most of them used drugs since their early adolescence.

Becoming a Father

As transformation begins with a "critical incident", the process of becoming a father usually starts with the information about pregnancy. As it was stated before, according to A.L. Strauss, turning points involve experiencing surprise, shock, anxiety, tension. These are almost precisely the words the interviewed men used to describe their own reactions to when they were told by their partners they would have a baby. What they experienced respondents called "a total surprise", "shock", "mortal fear", "becoming speechless", "getting terrified". None of the research participants expected or planned being a father at the time it happened. For the interviewees, the fact that their partners got pregnant was

¹⁹ At least a few of the research participants claimed they tried to avoid drinking alcohol because it made them lose control and go "mad". They preferred smoking marijuana, which in their opinion made them feel peaceful and more relaxed.

“an accident”, “a whoopsie”. In case of two teenage fathers, information about pregnancy caused psychosomatic reactions: one of them suddenly got high fever; another one fainted. Almost each of the respondents was thinking about abortion in the first place.^{20, 21} In the end, none of the respondents decided to terminate the pregnancy. For some, it took a couple of days or weeks to come to terms with the fact they would become a father: “[...] I didn’t expect that. But then, I started to be enthusiastic about it, to my own surprise. I got used to the thought that this child will be born, that I will have to think about everything now. I acknowledged that and when the baby was born, I was happy” (O.76). For others, it took years: “I did not want to see her [the baby’s mother] at all, I didn’t want anything at all [...] I was working all the time [...] I was drinking all the time, to forget [...] Then I was high with amphetamine for two years, all the time” (O.10).

First evident stage of teenage father’s transformation was taking up the role of a breadwinner and family provider. Expecting and then having a baby

²⁰ Although termination of pregnancy on “social” grounds has been banned in Poland, it is widely spread in so-called “abortion underground” (“20 lat tzw. ustawy antyaborcyjnej w Polsce” 2013). Contrary to popular opinion that in Poland only well-off women can afford an illegal abortion, interviews with young mothers from poverty enclaves suggested that termination of pregnancy is performed also among women of low socioeconomic status: female research participants often mentioned other women they knew (sisters, cousins, sisters-in-law, friends) having an abortion.

²¹ The decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or keep it was often made not only by the man and his partner (wife, girlfriend) but also with participation of the future young parents’ parents (grandparents-to-be), especially if the pregnant woman was living with them or expected their support: “My ‘father-in-law’ [informal, because the couple wasn’t officially married] wanted to abort the baby. So there were two sides: I was for the abortion and her father was for the abortion. She did not want it and her mother did not want it either” (O.10).

definitely changed the interviewed men’s attitude to work and earning: “First thing I did was getting a job” (O.10); “I just want to find a job and live in a normal way” (O.52). “When the baby was born I became more motivated, to earn money, so that we had enough for everything” (O.76). “When a baby comes, one needs to go to work. I have been working in the same place for one year! [said with pride]” (O.84). Interestingly, even to those who seemed not to accept the fact they would become/already are fathers the idea that now they are responsible for supporting their family financially was obvious. For example, one of the interviewees, who was angry with his girlfriend becoming pregnant, wanted her to terminate the pregnancy and was drinking and drug using for the whole period of pregnancy and for the first 2 years of his son’s life, found a regular, well-paid job and provided money to his new family, although at the same time he did not like to see them and met them occasionally, usually under influence of alcohol or drugs. Another respondent, a daily marijuana smoker, whose son was only 3 months old when the interview took place and who stated that “[When the baby was born] my whole life ended” (O.50) found his first-ever job (in a car wash) when his partner was pregnant and later on he went for a few weeks to Belgium where his older brother lived to work in construction to earn some money for the new-born. It seems that even when not ready to accept the fact they have a baby, respondents were able to accept the economic dimension of fatherhood, which might be considered a first step to becoming a father.

For those who came to terms with the idea of having a baby earlier, another move on the way to father-

hood was involvement in their partner's pregnancy. Many research participants recalled going to the obstetrician together with their girlfriends/wives (especially to the ultrasounds to see the baby), discussing a name for the baby, making decisions about moving in together, arranging apartments (or rooms in parents' or grandparents' apartments) they were going to live together with their babies, keeping an eye on and worrying about their pregnant partner's and baby's health (especially if the pregnancy was threatened), attempting to indulge their partners whims. Many interviewees were present at the hospital when their first baby was born: some assisted during labor and cut the umbilical cord, others were around and saw the baby for the first time very soon after it was born.

After the baby was born, values and priorities of young men were changing. For those interviewed fathers who had been involved in criminal activities, the birth of a baby became an impulse to reflect on risk associated with breaking the law. Studies on biographies of young offenders by John H. Laub and Robert J. Sampson (2006), present four pathways of desistance from crime in lives of "delinquent boys". The first of four major turning points is marriage (next to the military, reform school, and neighborhood change). Marriage (usually with children) is one of those situations that: "(1) knife off the past from the present; (2) provide not only supervision and monitoring but opportunities for social support and growth; (3) bring change and structure to routine activities; and (4) provide opportunity for identity transformation" (Laub, Sampson 2006: 148-149). Authors estimated "the marriage effect" on young offenders at 40% (the percentage of research

participants who desisted from crime after they got married) (Laub, Sampson 2006:272). Not only marriage but also having children and having a stable and long-lasting informal relationship is considered an important factor diminishing the probability of persistence in crime (Kacprzak 2014:171). The interviewed young fathers from poverty enclaves began to realize that in case of being caught they would not only lose freedom, but also a chance to be with their families and spend time with their partners and children on an every-day-basis. They understressed not only the baby's but the baby's mother's role in the desistance from crime: "I had had problems with the law, there was stealing and other things... [...] Many times I wouldn't come back home for the night, my mother was upset. But, then I met M. [girlfriend's name]. And I looked at everything from a different perspective. Everyone else but me [from the peer group] went to jail. But, to me it was over [with law-breaking]. Since the baby was born, all I have is work and family" (O.57). "[...] I got arrested. I was sentenced, I had a probation officer, two suspended sentences. And I met K. [girlfriend's name]. And so I began to calm down, hang out with other people. Then my son was born and I settled down completely" (O.71). "If it wasn't for my wife, I would end up in prison. You know where 'street life' gets you to. To me, family is everything. They bring sense to my life. My home, my wife, my family [children], my dog... [...] There was a time in my life when I was acting crazy. I met my wife and there came stability" (O.25).

A baby has become the central and reference point in the lives of young fathers. "When she [the daughter] is alright, then everything is alright" (O.52).

“All I do focuses on her [the daughter]” (O.54). “You know, when you’re a shithead without responsibilities, you can fool around. But when you have a baby, then you.... for example, you don’t think about yourself only, you’re not egoistic anymore” (O.83). Respondents claimed friends and amusements they had used to enjoy were no longer attractive or even became meaningless to them: “I stopped going to football games” (O.52). “My head turned a little [I’ve changed the way of thinking]. I no longer have friends from the old days [...]. You either want to live in this shit or you cut off from the shit. And I cut myself off from my friends” (O.10). “Earlier in my life I used to like amusement, having fun [with the ‘lads’]. Now I’m into more serious stuff” (O.75). For those respondents who had been suffering from addictions, having a baby made them stop or at least limit substance use: “When someone invites me to drink, I refuse, I don’t want my child to see me like that [drunk]” (O.75). “Ever since [the baby was born] I try not to use heavy drugs” (O.76). “I’ve quit smoking. I was afraid I’d bite the dust at the age of 40” (O.89).

The transformation was not sudden and was not easy. Some interviewees experienced ambivalence: “It was very difficult, this whole change. I hadn’t been well-behaved all the time, I hadn’t been constantly sitting at home. On weekends, I’d become anxious and in the end I’m always out for the night” (O.72). Separation from the old “mates” was not for everyone only a reason to be proud of, some respondents had a feeling of a loss and regretted not being in contact with old friends anymore. Some young fathers expressed grief for the good old times that were already gone. They were

missing their “lads”, having fun, freedom to do something else, but work and spending time with a family. “Yes, all has changed. I broke up with my lads, and I had known a lot of them. I had had many friends, male and female. And then, it was just work, the baby, home, work, the baby, home. Nothing else. We’re not going anywhere anymore, just work, the baby, home [with sadness]” (O.88). Some interviewees noticed that having a baby put a sudden end on their own childhood and forced them to become adults which was not what they were looking for at that time: “I took my childhood away from myself [...] The moment I started my own family, my childhood had ended” (O.83). “I feel a little bit... damn, older than I am supposed to be, you know, I have to stay at home because there’s the baby and someone needs to take care of the baby. But, in the end I already got used to it” (O.82). Also, remembering how profitable illegal business was, the interviewees sometimes longed to go back to their criminal past. Still, the awareness of the consequences not only for them but for their loved-ones, made them deter: “Sometimes I had this feeling I would like to go to make some more money, but [I think of] my kid and it always cools me off. If I get caught, it is not just me getting the shaft, but my wife gets it, and who knows, maybe they [social services] would take my kid away. This stops me from doing something stupid” (O.76). However, two of the youngest research participants (one 18, the other 19 years old, their babies were a couple months old) were still doing “business” and had no regular jobs. Both of them expressed a need to change the way they lived, although at the moment the research was done they seemed not ready to accomplish it.

Defining Fatherhood, Redefining Oneself

Having a baby made the young men work out a definition of fatherhood and set up a new self-definition as fathers. For the respondents it was difficult to precise what fatherhood is and what it means to them. "This question bothers me [...] couple of people already asked me this question [about the meaning of being a father] and I really... [don't know]. Maybe because I didn't have a father myself. There were always men [mother's boyfriends] at home, another one every year or two. The last one used to beat me, my mom is still with him, but I never considered him as my father [...]. My real dad killed himself when I was three. I don't even remember him" (O.54). Lack of their own father or bad memories of men who replaced him (mother's partners) made it difficult for respondents to capture the essence of fatherhood or it induced them to construct the idea of fatherhood in opposition to what they had experienced. "I want my children to have everything, food, clothing, I don't want them to see what I had to look at [things such as] drinking. I want them to live in a clean place, I want them to observe who we are and learn from us. Mother and father should not fight with each other. I want to help my kids to do homework, I want to help them with everything. The most important thing is that they would finish school, not like me, so that they wouldn't follow their lads" (O.57). "I want to be an exceptional father. Not the father my dad was to me. I want to be a *reversed* father [to whom my father was]" (O.10).

Being a father meant to the respondents, first and foremost, big responsibility and serious obliga-

tion, understood primarily as securing the material needs of their children. "It is taking care of them having everything" (O.88); "Very big responsibility. You need to feed them, send them to school, make something of them" (O.74). The interviewees felt that despite working hard, it was difficult for them to satisfy all the family's material needs.

Next to the economic dimension of fatherhood the interviewees stressed that "to begin with being a father means having time for your children, so that they see something positive, for example what a real home life is like. Being a father is taking care of the home, securing this warmth at home, so that children do not feel anything negative" (O.73). Good fathering is the time a man spends with his children and the good example he gives to them: "I want to be a role model, so that they could learn from me and follow me in what I am doing. I have some rules in life and they will follow the same rules, for example they won't end up in jail" (O.10). "To bring up a child is to show him/her the straight road [to adulthood, in life], not drugs, not alcohol [...] to try to be with them when they need it, talk to them" (O.75). In respondents' opinions, a father not only guarantees material security but also provides emotional stability: "Children are supposed to experience this... love... and be able to give it back [...] they must be sure they have a father and that the father will always help" (O.82). The interviewees admitted they were experiencing problems reconciling the both aspects of fatherhood: providing for their families and being there for them. "Lately I haven't seen my kid a lot. I mean, I see him, but I don't have a good contact with him because I work night shifts [in the evening I'm off to work] and he spends days

at kindergarten or at my mom's" (O.72). Tension between work and family life made some of the interviewees reorganize their work obligations in order to find work for their children.

To men from dysfunctional families with interfamily violence and alcohol problems, who were themselves neglected as children, the birth of a child induced self-reflection and re-definition of their relationship with their parents, now in the grandparents' roles. The transformation to fathering involved setting up new rules on contacting families of origin (if their members were still alive). Also, the process of becoming a father evoked reflection on the burdening "heritage" young men felt they received from their parents and on the lack of positive mother and father role models. Some men decided to put a ban on contacts with their families of origin: "I prefer not to go there [to his parents]. I also don't want anyone here to know what kind of parents I have [so they are not invited]. They would never arrive sober" (O.76). "I feel sad because I talk to them and they don't get it, I feel sad because they cannot separate alcohol [from their grandchildren], I feel sad because my mother doesn't want to come here and expects me to go to their place [...] she has only come here twice, within five years [...] she is blocked with this whole alcoholism, with everything. I feel I do not love my parents, at present. I don't love my parents" (O.10). A stable relationship with the mother of a child however may have offered to young fathers a chance to become a member of another, in some cases more functional and reliable family. Respondents' relations with formal or informal in-laws were sometimes much closer and more constructive than with their own relatives. "I have a[n older]

brother, a sister, and a younger brother. I don't get along with them, but I do get along with my wife's [parents and siblings]. They help us a lot" (O.25).

Most interviewed fathers declared being very much involved with their children (and often also partners). As it was already stated, the process of transformation from juvenile delinquent into a father, meaning a caring companion and a family breadwinner took weeks, months, and for some interviewees even years. One of the respondents, whose girlfriend got pregnant when he was 16 and she was 17 years of age and who did not want the baby to be born, but she refused having an abortion, took up a job as a construction worker in a small town near Lodz. For about three years he lived at the same place he worked at, serving also as a night watchman at the construction site. He was working, drinking and drug using as he "wanted to forget about everything" (O.10), seeing his child and his mother sporadically. At those infrequent meetings he would become aggressive, he often accused the woman of having cheated on him and doubted whether the baby is really his. As he admitted during the interview, he "wasn't a good dad at all" (O.10). Still, he would stay in irregular contact with his son and his mother and support them financially. The young father's supervisor at work was a sober alcoholic, not drinking for 7 years. With this missing father-figure man's help the interviewee gave up amphetamine and reduced drinking which allowed him to establish a better relationship with his son and his mother. As he puts it, he "started feeling love for the older son when he was about 3 years old" (O.10). At that time the couple started living together (with the woman's mother, at her place as they had

nowhere else to go) and their second son was born. The respondent was aware that he “messed up the first years of his children’s lives” (O.10) he wanted to make it up to them, especially to the older one. He said he loved his children but evidently he needed time to get to know how to love them. As his biggest success in life he considered the fact that he had become different to his parents, alcohol addicts who neglected their four children. He was also proud he had broken up with his friends and had a well-paid (although unregistered) job (as a pavement maker) thanks to which he gained skills he could use to set up his own business. After almost eight years, which have passed since he found out his girlfriend was pregnant, he had a feeling of “being sucked up by family” (O.10).

Conclusions

Literature review on contemporary parenthood shows that today’s fatherhood requires skills and attitudes which were not expected from fathers a couple of decades ago. Demands posed at men who are to become fathers are high: not only are they expected to play the role of the family primary breadwinners, but also to establish and cultivate close, intimate relationships with his children (and their mothers).

Put into the conceptual framework set by A.L. Strauss, becoming a father as a teenager may be looked at as a turning point in the life of young men, offering them a chance for transformation, new identity and passage of statuses. As the “social clock” in Euro-American culture societies indicates teenage fatherhood as premature, the movement

from one status to another is not completely regularized and the young fathers are forced to follow the “rules” of the passage set for older and middle-class men. Teenagers from poverty enclaves, due to their family background, often lack proper “predecessors”, “guides” who could make their transformation easier. Also, because of the gendered character of welfare institutions and marginalization they themselves and the whole communities they are a part of experience, they lack institutionalized support that could facilitate the passage of statuses.

Literature review on teenage parenting offers two different perspectives of early childbearing: one shows teen parenthood as a calamity, a route to social exclusion, a trajectory; the other presents it as a life opportunity, possible path to social inclusion, a chance for positive identity. The academic outlook on teen parenting obviously depends on theoretical orientation and research methodology. In the referred empirical, qualitative study young men brought up in multi-problem families in so-called poverty enclaves themselves reconstructed and assessed the transformation process they underwent from early school dropout, juvenile delinquent, addicted trouble-making teenagers into young fathers and family men. The process oftentimes turned out to be painful and involved redefining and revising one’s self, not only in reference to new roles but also in relation with “good enough”, as well as destructive, trajectory-inducing significant others. Being aware of the specificity of the researched group (as an effect of the method of selecting the sample) in the light of the above paragraphs it seems justifiable to state that early fatherhood may become a source of positive identity for young marginalized men.

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