

College Men, Unplanned Pregnancy, and Marriage: What Do They Expect?

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We conducted a qualitative content analysis of written responses from 148 college men to questions about pregnancy resolution and marriage in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. We used Marsiglio's (1991) concepts of procreative consciousness and responsibility as a source of theoretical sensitivity during data analysis. Men's written comments were analyzed using a modified version of the grounded theory method of open, axial, and selective coding. Three distinct groups emerged: "I expect to raise my child" (86.5%); "I don't expect to raise the child" (10.1%); and "I expect to let my partner decide" (3.4%). Several subgroups also emerged among men who intended to raise the unplanned child: Yes, I expect to get married; "No, I don't expect to get married"; "I don't know if we'd marry"; and "My partner and I would coparent." Across subgroups, conditional variations and reasons underlying expectations were noted. Much variability was observed in men's descriptions of their procreative responsibility. A majority expressed high expectations for personal obligation and responsibility if involved in an unplanned pregnancy. Future research on men's sexual and reproductive health and procreative consciousness and responsibility are discussed.

Introduction

Unplanned pregnancy is a major issue in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2012). Recent estimates suggest that about half of all pregnancies are not planned (Finer & Henshaw, 2006), with the highest rates among women ages 20 to 24. Further, 53% of pregnancies among women with "some college" education are unplanned (Finer & Henshaw, 2006; Henshaw, 1998). These numbers are of concern because of the deleterious consequences linked to unplanned pregnancy (for review, see Logan, Holcombe, Manlove, & Ryan, 2007) for both parents (e.g., decreased mental health, increased relationship violence) and children (e.g., poor physical health, poor mental health, and poor educational outcomes).

Although the risks for unplanned pregnancy are highest among women who are emerging adults (ages 18 to 25; see Arnett, 2000), limited attention has been given to men in this same developmental period who may potentially father these children. Although some studies address men's intentions regarding unplanned pregnancy, they focus primarily on adolescent samples (e.g., Marsiglio, 1989). Emerging adulthood constitutes an important developmental period for further exploration and identity development (Arnett, 2004) in which individuals determine desired characteristics of future romantic partners and form personal and relationship expectations (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009). Given the dearth of information on men's expectations during this unexplored developmental period, we focused on men's expectations for marriage and pregnancy resolution in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. Knowing how men describe these expectations will inform efforts to promote men's responsible fathering behaviors (see Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998) in the event of an unplanned

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pregnancy and identify potential barriers to emerging adult men's sense of obligation and responsibility.

Emerging Adults and Unplanned Pregnancy

Adolescent childbearing has been the topic of much research (see Logan et al., 2007); however, less research has investigated childbearing among young men and women who have transitioned from adolescence into emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood is a distinct period marked by further exploration, development of independence, and personal decision making (Arnett, 2006). It is during this period that individuals make key decisions regarding romantic and sexual relationships (Allen, Husser, Stone, & Jordal, 2008; Arnett, 2004). Many who graduate from high school choose to attend colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), where they learn to navigate sexual relationships in a climate with influential sexual norms (Bogle, 2008).

Although college students may form long-term relationships and have sexual encounters in monogamous, committed relationships, attention has recently focused on alternative sexual encounters, including *hooking up* (Bogle, 2008; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010), *friends with benefits* (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Owen & Fincham, 2011), and *booty calls* (Jonason, Li, & Cason, 2009). These sexual encounters hold several important similarities, including limited expectations for commitment, engaging in a variety of sexual behaviors from deep kissing to intercourse, and increased exposure to deleterious emotional health (e.g., negative emotional reactions; Owen & Fincham, 2011) and physical health (e.g., increased exposure to sexually transmitted infections; Fielder & Carey, 2010) outcomes. Of interest here is the increased potential for unplanned pregnancy from such encounters. For example, findings suggest that most hookups do not include the use of barrier methods (e.g., male or female condoms, dental dams; Downing-Matibag & Geisinger, 2009; Fielder & Carey, 2010). Limited or inconsistent contraceptive use increases the potential for unplanned pregnancy.

Emerging Adult College Men

The reproductive and sexual health of emerging adult college men has received limited scholarly attention (Forrest, 2001). Although some research has addressed sexual risk behavior (e.g., Smith, Gutherie, & Oakley, 2005), contraceptive use and discussion (Manlove, Ikramullah, & Terry-Humen, 2008; Ryan, Franzetta, Manlove, & Holcombe, 2007), and the potential for or actual experiences of unplanned pregnancy (Marsiglio, 1988, 1989) among men, these studies primarily focused on adolescent samples. Emerging adulthood, as a stage

in the individual life course, is an extension of adolescence with regards to identity development and exploration (Arnett, 2004); however, the sexual and reproductive experiences may be distinct among emerging adult college men given their increased autonomy (e.g., going off to college) and increased financial independence (Arnett, 2006).

Compared to women, men hold more permissive attitudes about sex, particularly with regards to casual and nonmarital sex (Petersen & Hyde, 2010). Men also report more willingness to engage in nonromantic sex (i.e., hook up; Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2005), although these findings have not always been replicated (e.g., Owen et al., 2010). Such gender comparison regarding sexual experience is warranted, but recent evidence supports the need to attend to how young adult men differ from one another. For example, Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, and Ward (2009) examined qualitatively men's definitions of *hooking up* and *friends with benefits*, two prominent casual sex relationships among college populations. They found that although men held similar definitions, they differed in their actual engagement in these behaviors. That is, most men enacted the "hookup script" in a manner that varied from the definition of the behaviors.

In another study using a young adult male sample, Dworkin and O'Sullivan (2005) examined how men varied in their enactment of traditional male sexual scripts among men in sexually active committed romantic relationships. They found that many of their participants did not follow a traditional sexual script but preferred that their female partners act as pursuer of sexual intimacy. In a recent study using a college male sample, Olmstead, Pasley, and Fincham (2012) found that men were more likely to hook up if they drank alcohol, were extroverted, and had a history of hooking up. Further, being more thoughtful about relationship decisions and being in a stable committed relationship served as buffers of casual sex behavior. These studies demonstrate the need to further our understanding of how men differ in their sexual and reproductive experiences. Such knowledge may promote awareness of men's needs and intervention or prevention efforts, specifically where procreative outcomes (i.e., unplanned pregnancy) are concerned.

Men's Procreative Consciousness and Responsibility

A useful conceptual framework for understanding the cognitive dimensions of sexual behaviors among men is *procreative consciousness* (Marsiglio, 1991, 1998). According to Marsiglio (1991), procreative consciousness is the collective of men's "cognitive and affective activity within the reproductive realm" (pp. 269–270). A central aspect of men's procreative consciousness is an awareness of their ability to procreate (Marsiglio, 2003). Such awareness potentially influences men's

self-definitions or identity and sexual behaviors and serves to reinforce their sense of masculinity (Marsiglio, 1991, 1998).

Marsiglio, Hutchinson, and Cohan (2001) further suggested that procreative consciousness includes “situational procreative consciousness” (p. 124). The prospect of an unplanned pregnancy is considered one instance of situational procreative consciousness in which men are forced to recognize their procreative potential. The actions men take in relation to their procreative consciousness is termed *procreative responsibility*, defined as the extent to which men are involved in the outcomes of their procreative actions and the types of behaviors in which they engage (e.g., involvement with their child). It also includes their “personal sense of obligation” in a variety of areas related to acts of procreation (e.g., contraceptive use/discussion; Marsiglio, 1991, p. 272).

Current Study

Consistent with Marsiglio’s (1991) concepts of procreative consciousness and responsibility, we sought to create a consciousness-provoking event by asking college men to consider their marital and pregnancy resolution intentions in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. Due to the ethics and impossibility of creating an actual unplanned pregnancy, we relied upon hypothetical scenarios to gain an understanding of their expectations in this instance. A similar approach was used in previous quantitative studies with adolescent males and females (e.g., Brazzell & Acock, 1988; Marsiglio, 1988, 1989). Consistent with the concept of procreative responsibility, we attended to how men resolve an unplanned pregnancy, including the potential for marriage. Also, by attending to men’s language, we hoped to gain greater insight into their sense of obligation or level of interest in taking responsibility for the outcomes of their behavior (Marsiglio, 1991).

We contribute to the extant literature in several ways. First, we sought to add to the literature on understanding expected behavior related to outcomes of sexual behavior among college men, on which there is limited research. Second, we focused specifically on men because limited research exists regarding college men’s sexual and reproductive health (Forrest, 2001). We also sought to understand the variations in men’s experiences and expectations, so as to advance the ability to intervene with or educate them about unplanned pregnancy on college campuses. Third, we used qualitative methods to gain insight into men’s sense of obligation related to an unplanned pregnancy at a distinct period in their lives (emerging adulthood). We attended to the language they used to glean insight into within-group variations in their sense of obligation and responsibilities regarding their procreative actions. We believe that this sensitivity can inform efforts to promote men’s involvement with the child should an unplanned pregnancy occur by providing

a description of potential barriers to men’s responsibility behaviors.

Method

Qualitative content analysis uses written text as the main source of data (Krippendorff, 2004). We applied the constant comparative method of grounded theory methodology (LaRossa, 2005) to gain depth in understanding men’s expectations about unplanned pregnancy and marriage. Our study was guided by several research questions:

- RQ1. What are college men’s expectations about marriage and pregnancy resolution in the event of an unplanned pregnancy?
- RQ2. How do these men’s expectations differ from previous research on adolescent males? What words do they use to frame their expectations?
- RQ3. What types of variations emerge in men’s articulation of their expectations regarding unplanned pregnancy?

Participants

The sample was drawn from undergraduate students enrolled in a course on family development over the life span at a large Southeastern university. The course fulfilled a liberal studies credit, and thus the students represent a variety of majors and programs across the campus. The data used here are from a larger study on emerging adult romantic relationships approved by the university institutional review board. Students in the course included both men and women at various stages in their education. For our purposes, we limited the sample to include only men. Of 190 potential male participants, 151 provided written responses to the questions of interest for this study. One participant was removed because he was already a father. In addition, two men who self-identified as gay were removed because they stated in their written responses to our questions that the study was not applicable to them given their sexual orientation. Thus, our final sample consisted of 148 men. Respondents were on average 19.5 years of age ($SD = 1.42$, range = 18 to 24). Most (61.5%) identified as Caucasian, followed by African American (21.6%), Latino (10.8%), Asian American (4.1%), and Native American (2.0%). Regarding year in school, 41.9% were sophomores, 27% were freshmen, 20.3% were juniors, and 10.8% were seniors. At the time of the study, most (60.8%) reported not being involved in a romantic relationship. Nonparticipants were similar to participants in age, race, and grade level. Our sample was racially similar to recent percentages of the population of undergraduate college men provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (2008).

Procedures

Participants were informed that the study was confidential in nature and that only research assistants would view their responses. Those who chose to participate received course credit, and those who chose to not participate completed an alternative written assignment to receive course credit.

Demographic data. After providing written informed consent, participants accessed an online survey during the first week of the semester. They were asked a variety of questions regarding emerging adulthood, romantic relationships, and family relationships. For our purposes, only demographic data were used to describe the sample.

Textual data. Also during the first week of the semester, participants answered a series of open-ended questions about future romantic relationships. Through the course website, participants accessed a document containing the questions and were instructed on how to complete the assignment and then upload the responses to the course website where research assistants could view their answers. We chose to allow participants to respond to the items on their own time and terms, rather than being in the presence of others, in a lab, or in a classroom with the hope of increasing reliable responses. Written responses as a part of a course have been used by others (e.g., Allen et al., 2008; Kaestle & Allen, 2011). Because the study was confidential rather than anonymous, the written responses were then linked to the demographic data. For our purposes, we examined men's written responses to the following questions (see PREP for Individuals, Inc., 2005):

1. If your partner became pregnant, would you expect to marry and raise the child together?
2. If not, how would you resolve the pregnancy?

Consistent with the conceptual framework guiding our study, the intent of the questions was to induce a consciousness-provoking event. The term *partner* was not defined further so participants could define the term in a manner consistent with their own interpretation of the questions. Given the sexual climate on college campuses and the prevalent hookup culture (Bogle, 2008), we did not want to limit responses to the exclusion of those who were, or conversely were not, in exclusive romantic relationships.

Prior to analyzing the data, we reviewed each participant's response. During this review, we noted that a few men provided limited responses, decreasing our ability to gain a complete picture of their thought processes and affective approach to addressing marriage intentions and pregnancy resolution in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. Although this was the case for a

limited number of responses, the content of these men's responses warrant inclusion in this study. We considered these limited responses as a potential reflection on these men's proactive consciousness. That is, it is possible that these men were perhaps less proactively conscious than men who responded in a more thorough manner. We also considered that for some of these men, this study experience did not serve as a consciousness-provoking event. Despite these threats to response quality, our sample was large enough, and the responses were compelling enough, to warrant data analysis. Given this issue, we encourage caution in overgeneralization of our findings.

Data Analysis

We used a modified approach to open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to guide our analysis that was not intended to build theory. Each participant response was analyzed by four independent coders. LaRossa (2005) recommended the use of a concept-indicator model during the coding process. For our study, we focused first on examining responses and grouping similar responses together, using written comments as indicators of group membership. Groups were then examined separately to determine meaningful variations that exist within each group, an approach similar to that used by Allen and colleagues (2008) in examining college students' sexual decision making. Consistent with grounded theory methods, steps were taken to maintain the validity and accuracy of the responses. Four coders were used throughout the coding process, with a fifth coder later used to confirm the emerging groups and variations; memos were kept and notes retained from every session in which coders met to form an auditable trail of the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Open coding. Each coder reviewed the first 20 responses and then met to discuss the emerging groups and indicators (responses) that supported each. When coders did not agree on groups or under which group a response fit, the team discussed these differences until consensus was reached. After this initial meeting, these same responses were reexamined by all coders, as were the next 20 responses using the agreed-upon groups. The team then met again to discuss any additional groups that emerged and supporting indicators. This process continued until all 148 responses were coded. During this process three distinct groups emerged, as did unique factors that seemed to play a prominent role in influencing men's expectations for pregnancy resolution and marriage.

Axial coding. Within the axial coding process, variations within groups (subgroups) emerged when responses were compared and contrasted. As a part of this process, Glaser (1978) suggested examining coding families, one of which he refers to as the "Six Cs"

(p. 74). These include *causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions*. Here, we focused primarily on conditions men gave for their expectations. We also attended to the justifications or reasons men gave for their expectations.

Selective coding. During a traditional use of grounded theory methods, the theoretical story emerges during the selective coding phase (LaRossa, 2005). Although our intent was not to develop theory, we did attend to prominent story lines that emerged from the data and considered how these story lines could be best understood within the procreative consciousness and responsibility framework (Marsiglio, 1991). We also utilized this phase of analysis in a manner consistent with that of previous research examining procreative identity. For example, Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) considered how their findings (themes) regarding gay men's identities (paternal, procreative, and family) fit with the broader literature on gay and straight fathers. Thus, we compared the story lines that emerged from our analyses to previous research on marital intentions and pregnancy resolution in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. Because these past findings primarily use adolescent male samples, we were able to consider the potential influence of age and life stage differences between adolescent and emerging adult men. In addition, because we employed a qualitative approach, we were able to identify important influential factors (i.e., conditions that emerged from the axial coding) that were not readily evident from past literature, which is largely quantitative.

Results

Three groups of men emerged from the written responses with different story lines. In the event of an unplanned pregnancy, one group of men stated that they would expect to raise the child. Another group of men said that they would not raise an unplanned child. A third group intended to relegate this decision to the child's mother. Meaningful subgroups also emerged, primarily among men who reported an expectation of raising the child.

Group 1: "I Expect to Raise My Child"

Of the three groups that emerged, this group included the greatest number of men (86.5% of the total sample). It was clear from their written comments that these men felt an obligation to maintain involvement in their children's lives. Although being young and in college was not deemed to be a convenient time to have a child, they identified with a sense of duty and responsibility for their procreative actions. This was their dominant story line. Four subgroups of this group also emerged and are described in the following sections.

Subgroup 1: "Yes, I expect to get married." This was the largest subgroup among those who expected to raise their unplanned child (44.6% of the total sample). Several important motivations were reflected in their narratives, promoting their sense of obligation and interest in making the transition to fatherhood. For example, some men noted an acute awareness of the link between their sexual and procreative responsibility. As one 18-year-old said, "Yes, I believe that if I am mature enough to make that decision [to have sex], I have to be mature enough to handle the repercussions of caring for a child." Faced with a consciousness-provoking event, some men determined that alternatives other than marriage are less attractive than marrying the child's mother. A 19-year-old stated, "If my partner and I got pregnant, I would expect to try and marry that person and raise the child together. I would not want to break up and try sharing the baby." Other men suggested that marrying the child's mother and raising the child was an important personal obligation given their role in creating life. For example, a 20-year-old said, "Yes [I would expect to marry and raise the child together], because I feel like it is the right thing to do. Even though it's not my body, it's still my blood." Another 19-year-old expressed similar sentiments:

If my partner got pregnant right now I would feel that [it] was [my] duty to marry and raise the child to the best of my ability. I would accept my role as the child's parent and handle responsibilities as they come.

For other men, it was not clear when marriage might come, or if it would come at all. These men were cognizant that potential marriage was not certain. However, their intentions were to eventually marry, even if it took time and patience. As one 18-year-old explained,

If my partner and I got pregnant, I would hope that we were already married, and did not marry just for the sake of the child. If I was unmarried and my partner got pregnant, I would think that from my personal views on relationships that we would eventually one day be married. If we were not married, I would resolve the pregnancy by staying with the person to raise the child on their own and I would be a part of the child's life.

Still other men reported an expectation to marry and raise the child because of the needs of the child. They suggested that the child should have the best possible environment given the unplanned nature of the pregnancy. In their views, the best environment included parents who were married. As an example, a 19-year-old stated, "If my partner and I became pregnant I would most definitely choose to keep the child. I would also choose to marry my partner and attempt to build a family life for the sake of my child." Thus, the

prominent story from these responses was that they intended to marry the child's mother due to a sense of duty or responsibility and that a two-parent family would benefit the child.

Subgroup 2: "No, I don't expect to get married." Another subgroup of men (28.4% of the total sample) emerged who, despite reporting no intention to marry the child's mother, also reported an expectation to remain involved in the child's life and raise him or her, even if it was on their own as a single parent. Their dominant story line was: "I don't need to marry her just because she is pregnant." As one 19-year-old participant explained, "I don't think I would marry her just because of the pregnancy, but I would help as much as I could to support the child." Not only did these men feel that marriage should not occur because of an unplanned pregnancy, many of them went on to suggest that doing so would be harmful to the child:

I think that subjecting a child to a bad marriage is just as bad [as], if not worse than, having a split home. I would want her to have the baby, and I would still want to be known as that baby's father, fulfilling any and all duties. We could still be "raising the child together" in that our relationship should be working for the best interest of the child, but we would not have to be married, or live in the same house. (20-year-old)

As a part of demonstrating procreative responsibility, these men identified a need to promote a relationship with the child's mother that would positively influence the child. As one 18-year-old commented, "I would not expect to marry my partner but I would expect to raise the child together by maintaining a relationship with [my] partner, whether it be intimate or a mere friendship, for the sake of the child." Similar to the men who expected to marry the child's mother, they also acknowledged the need to take responsibility for being a part of the child's life. An 18-year-old put it best when he said, "I understand that it would be my full responsibility to take care of a child I took part in making, but I don't think marrying the mother of my child is the best solution."

Subgroup 3: "I don't know if we'd marry." A much smaller subgroup (5.4% of the total sample) of men held a story line of uncertainty regarding marriage as a result of an unplanned pregnancy. Although they appeared definitive in their child-rearing decision, they were not sure whether marriage was the best step to take. One young man explained, "In the event of a pregnancy in my relationship, I would expect to raise the child extremely well. I would not let pregnancy rush me into marriage, but would not let it push me away from it either." This example provides a clear indication of the

ambiguity regarding marriage coupled with a commitment to child rearing in this instance.

Subgroup 4: "My partner and I would coparent." Rather than marry, another small subgroup (8.1% of total sample) expected that they would coparent in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. These men focused only on shared parenting with the child's mother. One 19-year-old commented, "If my partner were to become pregnant I would take full responsibility for it and help raise it. I would help pay for the child's stuff as well as try and spend time with it." Frequently, they indicated that coparenting specifically meant raising the child with the partner whom he had impregnated ("If that situation would occur I would like for us to raise the child together"). Thus, these men believed that raising the child was a necessary responsibility that should be carried out in conjunction with the child's mother, but they did not specify an expectation for marriage.

Group 2: "I Don't Expect to Raise the Child"

A second group emerged that consisted of men who did not expect to raise the child in the event of an unplanned pregnancy (10.1% of the total sample). Their dominant story line was that their current life stage was not compatible with child rearing. For example, one 19-year-old stated, "If my partner became pregnant, I wouldn't expect to marry or raise a child this early in my life." In fact, several of these men explained that they were not ready for the responsibilities associated with fatherhood and marriage. As one 21-year-old explained, "At this point in my life I am not ready to have children or get married." Others focused on their inability to successfully father a child at this stage and age and would choose not to marry and raise a child for the child's sake, as suggested by one 19-year-old participant: "I would not expect to marry and raise the child together now. I believe that as of now this age is far too young to raise a child successfully and give it what it needs and wants."

A large number of these men focused solely on abortion as the way to resolve the unplanned pregnancy. They appeared resolute that raising an unplanned child was not an option and that, as opposed to other options, terminating the pregnancy was the best route. Some identified the importance of consulting with the mother about abortion ("At this stage in my life, if the mother was willing, I would opt for an abortion"), whereas others indicated that they had already discussed abortion with their partners in the event of an unplanned pregnancy ("If my partner became pregnant we have both agreed to opt for an abortion"). A few took more of an authoritarian stance ("If my partner became pregnant I would make her get an abortion").

Group 3: "I Expect to Let My Partner Decide"

The final group consisted of a few men (3.4% of the total sample) who indicated that it was not their decision to make. They suggested that the decision ultimately rested with their partners. For example, one 21-year-old participant explained, "If my partner got pregnant, we would talk it out. I would ultimately accept and support whatever choice she made, even if I wish otherwise." Further, a couple of men used their partners' decisions as an impetus to decide on the relationship ("If she chose to raise the child then I would give the relationship a chance"). In general, this group expected to defer the decision, direction of the relationship, and the prospects of future fatherhood to their pregnant partners.

Conditions for Raising an Unplanned Child

A variety of conditions emerged that situated men's expectations for child rearing when the pregnancy was unplanned. Rather than focusing on conditions for marriage, we emphasize the conditions for child rearing, although the way the question was asked made it difficult to separate the two potential outcomes. Conditions typically fell into three areas, those related to the respondent himself, his partner, and the father-mother relationship.

Himself. Several participants conditioned their responses to raising the child on one or more aspects of himself. Given that they were emerging adults attending college, the most frequent condition about the self reflected age or life stage (being in college) concerns. For example, these men used such phrases as "At this age and point in time," "as of now," or "how old I am." Some made more elaborate specifications, saying, for example, "I am not trying to have kids at this point in my life" and "This age is far too young to raise a child successfully and give it what it needs and wants." Other men acknowledged their lack of readiness to father, suggesting, "I'm not in the position to be a father right now" or "I don't want to bring a child into this world until I definitely have my feet and can provide for that child financially and emotionally." Thus, participants acknowledged that there was some aspect of self (age, life stage, or ability to provide) that affected their expectations for raising an unplanned child.

His partner. In the instance of an unplanned pregnancy, one's partner undoubtedly affects the decisions to raise the child, and participants frequently acknowledged this. Two conditional variations regarding partners emerged. One was her having the final say regarding pregnancy and childbirth. Participants used such language as "ultimately her choice," "It eventually comes down to the woman's choice," "If she decided to have it," and "It would be my partner's decision." Thus, many men recognized the key role that their partners would play in expectations surrounding an unplanned

pregnancy and that their making unilateral decisions was unrealistic.

Another variation had less to do with the female partner having the final say and more to do with her individual qualities. As one participant stated, "[The] mother would have to be a woman who knows how to carry herself." Thus, some men conditioned their intention to raise the child based on their perceptions of their partners' ability to become a successful mother. If she was deemed "future mother material," as one participant put it, then these men expected to marry and raise the child.

The father-mother relationship. The couple relationship served as an important condition to responses. Three aspects of the relationship emerged: love, duration, and envisioning a future together. Some men identified that a loving relationship was needed to participate in raising the child. They used such phrases as "deeply in love," "the person I loved," "if I truly loved the girl and she listened to my opinions," or "if it was a partner that I was really in love with [then] I would raise the child." Also, duration of the relationship emerged, as these participants' comments reflect:

I feel the decision is partially based on age and the extent of the relationship before pregnancy. If I was in a long relationship in which I knew my partner well and she became pregnant, I would marry her and raise the child. (18-year-old)

If my partner became pregnant, marriage would be determined by how serious our relationship was to begin with. For example, it would not be much of a problem to marry my girlfriend of three years because she got pregnant. However, while I doubt I would marry a girl I had been involved with for a month, I would be present in my son or daughter's life. (18-year-old)

Envisioning a future with the child's mother was a third prominent condition, as one 19-year-old participant explained: "If I could see myself being with my partner forever, then I would have no problem marrying her and raising the child."

Reasons for Raising an Unplanned Child

Men who expected to raise an unplanned child made a variety of statements that reflected their reasoning. The most prominent reasons were: himself, the father-mother relationship, and the child.

Himself. Comments from several men revolved around taking responsibility for their actions, striving to be a good father, and adhering to standards of moral conduct. For example, a 19-year-old participant explained:

If my partner got pregnant right now I would feel that [it] was [my] duty to marry and raise the child to my best

ability. I would accept my role as the child's parent and handle responsibilities as they come.

Many men discussed the necessity of raising the child because of the importance of being responsible for the outcomes of their personal decision to be sexual, or as one participant put it, "It takes two to tango." In addition, multiple participants also insisted that they would both raise the child and engage in behaviors that showed they were taking on the role of father seriously, as demonstrated by the comments of a 20-year-old participant: "I would be the best father I could be to that child and do whatever it takes to make sure he/she has a healthy and happy life." Thus, participants reasoned that they would take responsibility to raise the child and strive to engage in fathering behaviors, such as loving, providing, and ensuring a healthy environment for the child. Further, they suggested that the choice to do so was deliberate, with consequences for alternative choices, as this 19-year-old discussed:

I just can't see myself going through with having a limited relationship with that child and having little to no influence on their young life. I just wouldn't be able to sleep easy at night knowing that there was a little piece of me running around somewhere and I don't really have any contact with him or her.

Some participants resorted to standards of moral conduct or ideology as reasons for holding the expectation to raise the child, which typically encompassed two areas. Some participants' expectations included "doing the right thing." They expressed a sense of moral obligation to keep and raise the child regardless of the relationship. Others suggested that they would keep and raise the child because they did not believe in abortion or adoption as alternatives, as reflected in this statement from a 19-year-old participant: "If my girlfriend became pregnant then I would most likely end up marrying her because I personally don't agree with abortion."

The father-mother relationship. Some participants discussed facets of the couple relationship as reasons for their expectation to raise an unplanned child. A few of these identified their current romantic relationship as a suitable relational context for raising an unplanned child (e.g., "My girlfriend is a person I see myself marrying and who I would want to have my children"). A consistent response to whether men would marry was that pregnancy is not a suitable reason to do so, as discussed earlier. However, others suggested that the responsibility for the child resided in the couple relationship ("It would definitely be *our* responsibility to raise the child together" [*italics added*]) and that they would make a concerted effort to maintain some commitment to the child's mother ("I would probably try

and become committed to the relationship as soon as I heard") or that they would try to have a workable relationship to foster a healthy environment for the child ("I would try to make the relationship work to be able to raise a healthy family").

The child. A few men addressed the best interest of the child as a rationale supporting their expectations. Several reasoned that it was not the child's fault that he or she was conceived and several noted that they were not in a position to decide on abortion or place responsibility for the child on others. Such reasoning is evident in the following comment from a 19-year-old participant:

If my girlfriend were to get pregnant I would get married and have the baby even though it would be a very difficult situation. I would do this because I feel that every person deserves a shot at life and a chance in this world. And taking that chance away from an innocent child is not fair at all.

Others focused on what was "fair" to the child as he or she developed, often using language like "for the child's sake." This included anything from maintaining a relationship with the child's mother, to loving and supporting the child, to providing a loving environment for the child or placing the needs of the child before his own. Thus, these men were cognizant of issues of fairness to their potential unborn child and considered aspects of the relationship, the environment, or their own lives that should be considered when forming their expectations for handling an unplanned pregnancy.

Discussion

We focused on prompting situational procreative consciousness among a group of emerging adult college men by asking about their pregnancy resolution expectations and intentions to marry in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. We found several groups and subgroups as a result of this hypothetical event. Consistent with our analytic approach, which included situating the groups that emerged within the existing literature on men's intentions for pregnancy resolution and family formation in the event of an unplanned pregnancy, we discuss our findings in comparison to the ways in which they extend this literature.

Most of the men in our study expected that they would keep and raise the child (86.5%). This finding is consistent with those from a study of adolescent males (Marsiglio & Menaghan, 1990), with the most frequent preference being to engage in "some form of parenting" (p. 320). However, they diverged with regard to their expectations to marry. Among our sample of emerging adult men who intended to raise the child, most expected that they would marry the child's mother. Central to their story line was

that marriage was the best option and that part of being responsible to the child and the child's mother was to try and create a two-parent environment for child rearing. Previous studies (e.g., Marsiglio, 1988) found that adolescent males preferred to cohabit with the partner while also raising the child. It may be that this discrepancy simply reflects differences in age/maturity; in the event of unexpected pregnancy college men may see marriage as a more viable context for child rearing than do adolescents. It may also be that college men perceive themselves as having greater resources or responsibility because they are older, have more education and life experience, and are therefore more willing to marry and raise an unplanned child.

Fewer men who intended to keep the child had a story line that pregnancy was not a "good enough" reason to marry and that doing so may be harmful to the child. Importantly, procreative responsibility was reflected in their narratives, when they discussed striving to maintain a relationship (romantic or otherwise) with the child's mother. They reasoned that maintaining a working relationship with her was in the child's best interest.

Although men sought to demonstrate procreative responsibility through expecting to raise an unplanned child, another important response was that some men did not expect to raise the child. They demonstrated procreative responsibility by exploring their inability to take on a fathering role in their current life stage and circumstances. Most often, they gravitated toward abortion as a means of pregnancy resolution. Choosing not to raise the child was also found in Marsiglio and Menaghan's (1990) study, where 18.7% of their adolescent male sample chose abortion as means of pregnancy resolution, and 11.8% chose adoption (in total, 30.5% chose not to raise the child). In our study, only about 10% identified an expectation of abortion or adoption, suggesting a possible greater willingness among college men to engage in fatherhood.

An interesting group that emerged from our data (although few in number) included those who expected to defer the choice of pregnancy resolution and marriage to their sexual partners. They reflect what Marsiglio (1991, 1998) identified as procreative consciousness in a relational context. That is, men's procreative consciousness and responsibility is influenced by their sexual or romantic partners. These few men intentionally acknowledged their partner's agency as integral to decisions about an unplanned pregnancy. It may well be that these men defer to their partner to avoid the responsibility associated with this decision. However, it may also be that they wanted the decision to be shared, given that their partners would have to carry the child to term and give birth. More than any other group, they suggested that they would support the mothers' decision, regardless of whether they agreed with it. One possible explanation is that these men may have formulated an internal cognitive exchange with their

partners, thinking that if the mothers were willing to take sole responsibility for the decision, then these men would support their partners' decision. It is also possible that these men were more cognizant of their partners' role in the decision-making process and that because her body was ultimately affected by pregnancy, or abortion, they should defer this choice to her. More research is warranted concerning this group of men to understand the processes of arriving at the decision to defer and the ways in which their partners respond to men's deferrals.

Taken together, our results suggest that the expectations regarding an unplanned pregnancy among emerging adult college men are both complex and multifaceted. Most men conditioned their responses and provided rationales for their expectations. Across subgroups that expected to raise the child, men painted a picture of uncertainty unless key conditions were realized (e.g., love, age, readiness). It may be that these men, in light of our consciousness-provoking event, were using these conditions as a way to increase their perceived control of the situation. In reality, however, such conditions are not always met. Despite the potential for limited control over future events, the expectations individuals hold have been shown to be a useful predictor of future behavior, because they include attention to perceived control (Rhodes & Matheson, 2005). In this sense, men may attempt to increase control over situations when limited control is likely by specifying the conditions under which they make choices. Viewed in this way, the men in our study attempted to gain control of an uncontrollable circumstance by specifying conditions around himself, his partner, and their relationship. In terms of himself, many participants recognized their lack of readiness to father. Marsiglio, Hutchinson, and Cohan (2000) identified readiness as an important aspect of procreative consciousness. Like the adolescent men in Marsiglio's (1988) study, some of our participants were sensitive to the prospect of having their education interrupted due to an unexpected transition to fatherhood.

Further, their statements revealed in greater detail their procreative consciousness and responsibility, as many equated their willingness to raise an unplanned child with being "responsible" or taking on a "duty." It may be that they expected to atone for their "mistake" by engaging in behavior that they viewed as responsible (e.g., marrying the mother and/or raising the child to the "best of [their] ability"). Men also supported their choices by specifying the kind of father they intended to be: loving, supportive, providing physically and emotionally, "the best father" possible.

Our findings support the conclusion that the decision-making process associated with an unplanned pregnancy is complex from the perspective of emerging adult men in a circumstance where they have limited control (Marsiglio, 1998). Men do not have the ability

to carry the child to term, so often their feelings and considerations of such events are considered as secondary to those of the mothers (see Marsiglio, 1998). Our findings also suggest that college men are aware of the complexities associated with addressing an unplanned pregnancy and that they have feelings, often strong, tied to how they would address this event.

Limitations

Several limitations are evident here. Because of the methodology used, our findings are not generalizable to all college men in this developmental period. Although the sample was quite large for a qualitative study, our focus was to increase the depth of understanding of the process of addressing unplanned pregnancy in young men. We cannot conclude that the groups and subgroups emerging from our data would be the same for other samples.

The content analytic nature of the study prevented us from asking follow-up questions to clarify responses. This prohibited us from seeking further clarification and understanding that an in-depth interview might allow. Also, we did not follow up with participants to ensure that they agreed with the way in which we coded their responses, a process commonly referred to as member checking (Creswell, 1994). Thus, some men may have categorized their responses under different concepts or variations than those identified. Precautions, which were discussed earlier, were taken to increase the validity and accuracy of the coding.

Implications

The knowledge gleaned from this study has important implications for working with emerging adult men prior to or after having experienced an unplanned pregnancy. In terms of prevention, we agree with others (e.g., Fielder & Carey, 2010) that greater efforts should be devoted to promoting safer-sex practices on college campuses. By promoting safer-sex practices generally, the potential for unplanned pregnancy will likely decrease (in addition to decreasing sexually transmitted infection rates). However, specific attention to men is warranted. For example, men have been shown to engage more often in heavy episodic drinking (compared to women), which is linked to lower levels of condom use and engagement in other risky sex practices (Cooper, 2002). Thus, by increasing awareness and resources on college campuses to address binge drinking, such practice may decrease rates of unplanned pregnancy. Also important, other populations are also at risk for unplanned pregnancy, including men in committed romantic relationships. Such relationships remain the primary route to sexual intimacy among emerging adults (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011). Condom use may decline within these relationships, as partners may begin

to rely primarily on birth control pills in heterosexual relationships. Although birth control pills are a reliable method of contraception when used correctly, emerging adult men should be encouraged to consider continued use of condoms as a dual-method approach to lower the likelihood of unplanned pregnancy—generally and within these relationship contexts (Smith, Fenwick, Skinner, Merriman, & Hallett, 2011).

Implications for intervention revolve around working with emerging adult men who are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. As our findings indicate, many factors influence emerging adult college men's decision-making processes when it comes to unplanned pregnancy. The majority of the men in our study indicated a desire to father an unplanned child, so program efforts should be devoted to promoting responsible fathering among emerging adult men who have made an unexpected transition to fatherhood. Responsible fathering programs have been aimed at fathers from a variety of populations (e.g., Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2002) and can be tailored to address men in the period of emerging adulthood. Generally, such programs have the intent to increase father's involvement, including both physical (e.g., play, reading books) and emotional (e.g., nurturance, support) components. The men in our study identified potential barriers upon which these programs should focus to promote being an involved father. For example, such a program should address how to properly balance continued identity development (a key aspect of emerging adulthood; Arnett, 2000) while attending to the growth and development (both physical and emotional) of a new child. Helping men identify and use available resources, both in the community and at the college or university, so as to continue schooling and provide for the unexpected child may foster confidence in their ability to remain involved and invested in the child while also meeting personal and professional goals. Other men may have a greater concern regarding their readiness to be a father, as many of the men in our study indicated. This is expected given the period of the life course they are in currently. Thus, programs may benefit these men by focusing on their visions of fatherhood, their self-expectations for enacting the father role, and drawing on positive experiences with their own fathers or father figures after whom they may model their own fathering behaviors (see Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002).

Regarding implications for research, scholars suggest that research on men's sexual and reproductive health is limited, particularly among college-age men (Forrest, 2001). As such, greater attention to this topic is warranted, including men's responses to unplanned pregnancy—our focus here. Marsiglio (2004) identified qualitative research as a means of exploring men's experiences, feelings, and cognitions about procreative consciousness and responsibility, so we adopted this approach to gain a more thorough understanding of the meaning men ascribe to

such events and how they intended to act shapes their identities in such instances.

Although greater attention is directed to men's procreative consciousness and associated responsibility using qualitative methodology (Hutchinson, Marsiglio, & Cohan, 2002), we chose to narrow our focus to address two goals. One goal was to contribute to the knowledge about young college men who are experiencing a unique set of life circumstances, including increased autonomy, greater opportunity for sexual exploration and decision making, and the demands of attaining a college education. Another goal was to focus primarily on the instance of unplanned pregnancy to shed light on a circumstance that is inherently tied to limited control. Men's responses often reflected (a) attempts to increase perceived behavioral control, (b) their attitudes about unplanned pregnancy, and (c) the influence of social norms on their expectations.

In light of our findings, we recommend that future research focus on how men arrive at their decisions regarding unplanned pregnancy. That is, what have they learned from family members, friends, society, and their partners that influences their expected behaviors in the context of an unplanned pregnancy? In addition, exploring differences in the expectations of college men in different relationship statuses (e.g., long-term relationship versus a hookup) should be examined. Other factors also warrant study, including current education trajectory (e.g., freshmen versus seniors, plans for graduate school), previous sexual exploration (e.g., experiences prior to coming to college versus experiences only in college), contraceptive knowledge or behavior, and knowledge of or access to available resources at the university. Exploring influential factors such as these through quantitative methods would help confirm our results. In addition, future research should examine how men draw upon masculinity scripts as a part of the decision-making process regarding unplanned pregnancy and family formation. For example, a few of the men in our study appeared to draw upon traditional masculine scripts to exert control in this situation, whereas others were more egalitarian and placed emphasis on shared control of the decision. Thus, men may be drawing upon multiple masculinity scripts to guide their interpretation of the unplanned pregnancy and the paths toward resolution and family formation.

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