# MEN'S EXPERIENCE OF PARENTING FOLLOWING DIVORCE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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Men's Experience of Parenting Following Divorce
An Ethnographic Study

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## Abstract

This study explores, through ethnographic methodology, the culture of men who remain active in a parenting role following the dissolution of their marriage. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to discover the knowledge and understandings four divorced fathers use to order and interpret their realities. It was my intention to reflect, in the context of their culture, these men's evolving stories.

I employed ethnographic methodology which holds that cultural meaning is uncovered through an examination of how people use language. Specifically, I used Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interview and closely followed his developmental research sequence in my analysis. I presented my findings by way of three re-occurring themes.

The themes presented refer to both the internal and external forms of experience that comprise the lives of the informants. They are the understandings used by these four men who recognize the vital contribution they make in their children's lives. The themes speak to an inherent understanding of reciprocity in relationship.

This study explicates an understanding of the cultural knowledge these four fathers used to organize their behavior and to interpret their parenting experience.

It offers ideas for counsellor consideration and suggestions for further research into this area.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

> Being a father is more than a role. I can't separate myself, from Alex the dad, from Alex the kayaker, from Alex the guy who loves micro-breweries. I can't separate any one of them because being a parent, being a father involves all of them. It involves all of me. It is a synthesis of it all. So when I honor my role as a father I am honoring all of me. (Alex, 37, divorced nine years)

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to explore how four men realize, interpret and express the experience of parenting following divorce. It is a study of biography for it delves into the life stories of four men who remain actively involved in the fathering role following the dissolution of their marriage.

Until recently the dominant image of fatherhood in our culture has revolved around being the protector and provider (Kaufman, 1993). A father's work is in the world and in this world the emphasis is on production, competition and aggression. It is a world that accentuates activity and control, a world that suppresses passivity and receptivity. Fathers are men, which means they are not like women, they don't cry in defeat or during sentimental movies. They must perform well because a man without a successful job, a secure income and a promising career is only half a man (Cottle, 1981). These are the attitudes, styles and emotions that consciously or unconsciously we, as a society, have internalized and labeled as appropriately masculine.

Changes in the role of father began to occur in the 1960s with the rise of the women's movement. In 1974 Dr. Spock revised his bible of child care to give fathers more involvement in a child's daily activity (Astrachan, 1986). In 1978 some theories of infant development began to focus on both the possibility and the necessity of greater roles for fathers in the changes that women were making (Ehrensaft, 1990). Feminist ideas began

to alter the collective culture as well individual values and attitudes. Treatment of father as a second-class parent slowly began to shift as a growing number of parents began to resist accepting traditional family roles. Students of the family became increasingly aware that the mother was not necessarily the first, nor the only, influential individual in the child's development (Weinraub, 1978; Lamb, 1979). Thus what has often been described as "women's issues" are, in a different way, men's issues.

The cogent argument of feminists is that men exercise patriarchal power because they reap the benefits. Yes. Yet I believe the current challenge is to both move beyond feminism and to cherish its contributions. And feminism's contributions are many. My experience tells me that most men are neither so callous nor so self serving that reaping benefits can be a full explanation. What I have observed are men who, by virtue of their gender, have been given privileged positions and have paid a high price in terms of being less able to participate fully in intimate relationships and intimate experiences. I see men who are often suspicious and fearful of feelings; men who desperately need women and yet become abusive toward them. I see many men distant from their children, or from their fathers, and unsure how to get close. I see men who are scared and scarred but who live their lives with an aura of mastery and calm as they function from day to day. Harvard professor Carol Gilligan speaks of men as being constricted in their emotional expression (Gilligan, 1987).

Separation and divorce is a crisis time for both men and women. I have seen men extremely vulnerable during the process of divorce and, in particular, when faced with the fear of loosing their children. Indeed, studies indicate that it is fathers who suffer the most mental anguish following divorce (Gerstel, Reissman, & Rosenfield, 1985; Berman, 1985; McKenry & Price, 1990). The primary factor which contributes to this is loss of the relationship with their children (McKenry & Price, 1990). Despite shifts in the traditional definition of parenting roles society is not, overall, sympathetic to a father's sense of loss, nor to the necessity of equal treatment in the area of child care. Children continue to be

seen as central to the female domain. Paradoxically, while our changing society urges men to take a more active and affective role in their children's growth and development (May, 1990) during divorce men are often faced with a legal system that is inconsistent in its method of determining custody, support payments and visitation rights (McKenry & Price, 1990). Custody arrangements create an imbalance of power when one spouse has daily care and control of the children. Moreover, for some women control in the parenting area may be the first time they have experienced a sense of power (Ehresaft, 1990) and they are, understandably, reluctant to give this up. Even though there is a beginning support for men's new role in parenting both employers and legislation often remains unenthusiastic about men using work time for family concerns (Levant, 1990).

Historically men have been denied opportunities to develop the nurturant parts of themselves more fully (Astrachan, 1986). If we ignore men who continue to share in the raising of children following divorce and choose to focus upon "father absence" we will perpetuate yet another generation of males who have been told since boyhood, albeit subtly, that mothers are the true parents and fathers, at best, play a secondary role in the home. There is indication that men who raise children do change. In one study (Risman, 1987) single fathers and employed married mothers had almost identical levels of feminine traits, despite the preceding years of socialization. The feminist movement has spent the past several decades exploring differences in gender. This exploration has resulted in a definition of us as culture whose primary process has, for thousands of years, been defined through masculine eyes. And we have come to understand the price that masculine values of control and power have exacted on both men and women.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is, through ethnographic methodology, to develop knowledge into the culture of men who remain active in a parenting role following the dissolution of their marriage. The study explores the experience of four men who have

consciously chosen to remain involved with raising their children, men who have assumed a continued responsibility for nurturing their children. The study is based on the underlying assumption that meaning in a cultural experience can be discovered through analyzing conversations that occur between an ethnographer and informants (Spradley, 1979). It has been my intention to remain true to the experience of each informant in order to grasp the understanding of being a single male, actively engaged in a fathering role, in North American society, at this point in time.

Stories reflect the inner life. Our culture is riddled with a loss of feeling values because so many stories go on in the soul that are never given voice (Moore, 1992). I understand the participants of this study as storytellers, essential to the understanding of their culture. My intent in this study has been to reflect, in the context of their culture, these men's evolving stories. My purpose in this study has been to discover the knowledge and understandings these men use to order and interpret their realities.

## The Study

Divorce is a radical upheaval in one's life which may create confusion, stress and fear (Wallerstein & Blakesless, 1990). It is a time of crisis. I am told that the Chinese character for "crisis" is a combination of two figures. One represents danger and the other, opportunity: Danger and Opportunity. It is in the breakup of old meaning systems that one often finds the impetus for continuing change and personal growth. An important shift occurs as an individual moves from one system of structuring the world to another. Often the work of integrating the old with the new is not simply a cumulative process but a transformational one (Moore, 1992). The emphasis in ethnography on cultural meaning systems requires the researcher to explore not only the inner structures of the participants' experience but also the outer structures influenced by cultural learning and expectations (Spradley, 1979). Thus how the participants of this study will have understood divorce as

a "dangerous opportunity" and how that understanding impacts their life is central to this study

The culture in which we live affects our life enormously, much more perhaps than any of us are aware. Culture establishes norms, values and goals; it establishes expectations of what we ought to be accomplishing (Leafgren, 1990). Culture can support positive human growth and development and it can restrict growth and development. In the dominant culture to be an ideal parent implies being sensitive and responsive to the emotional, special and intellectual needs of children; it involves expressing warmth and affectionate feelings (Levant, 1990). To be masculine in our culture implies being powerful, successful and self-confident (Leafgren, 1990). Thus, the characteristics of the ideal parent and the masculine man conflict. This study examines men's changing sense of self by exploring how relationship with their children affects awareness of self. In other words, this study explores the effect of fathering, as a single parent, upon one's personal growth and development:

> At times even thinking of my kids would bring out a lot of sorrow, a lot of emotion. Often if I was in an atmosphere where there were a lot of feelings around and I thought of my kids I would just start to cry. So really this was more than just grief and loss, it opened me up to my feelings in general. It was a primal reality. (Philip, 48, divorced eight years)

Many men in our society have been taught a strong set of defenses in order to emotionally protect themselves throughout their life. The psychological defense around vulnerability and dependence develops early in life and forms a sort of crust around feelings (Louv, 1993). Many men respond to questions regarding their feelings with a rationale statement about cognitions. This study explores the effect of parenting as a single father upon such defenses and the fact that a nurturing relationship with their children helps men to recall their own youth and experiences of growing up:

> I am trying to just honor and respect my father for who he is, not attach value and blame and anger. I am seeing who he is, separating my stuff from his stuff. I think that he is on his path, he is who he is. I need to

> relinquish my stuff, my anger. It has been tough because I talk about the cycle - up and down, getting closer with him and then moving away again. To break that cycle and to remove myself and to find out more about who he is, what his purpose is, so that I see what gifts he has brought to this earth. He is a strong force in my life as I wrestle with how to be a parent myself, how to be a father. (Alex)

In order to create an understanding of the cultural context around the informants' experience it is necessary to review the literature on divorced fathers. The next chapter outlines a review of the literature including a historical and a contemporary perspective as well as the empirical research.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Review of the Literature

In order to contextualize the experience of fathers following divorce this chapter presents a chronological perspective on the evolution of child custody from ancient Rome to the present time. It then outlines the somewhat limited empirical research on divorced fathers which has centered on father absence until quite recently when the effect of child absence on the father has also been considered. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the essential pieces from which a synthesized picture will hopefully emerge.

### Historical Perspective on Child Custody

The word "custody" is derived from the Latin *custodia* which means guarding. The Oxford Dictionary (1990) defines custody as "guardianship; protective care" (p. 286). Child custody refers to the right granted a parent or other legal guardian to raise a child, to make decisions about that child's life, and to be legally responsible for the child's health and safety (Herman, 1990).

In ancient Rome, child custody was synonymous with ownership. Children were considered property, and Roman law gave the father complete control over his children, including the right to sell them or condemn them to death. The mother had no legal standing. This arrangement held for hundreds of years (Luepnitz, 1982).

Indeed, until the beginning of the 19th century British law was straight forward regarding child custody matters (Luepnitz, 1982). The law routinely awarded custody of children to their father because men possessed a property interest in their children. Women were almost a legal nonentity (Rotunda, 1987). The awarding of child custody was embedded in the gender distribution of the economic and legal power of the time (Jacobs, 1986a).

In the early 1800s, some interesting legal developments began to alter the father's authority. The concept of the absolute right of the father expanded to include certain responsibilities for the welfare of children. In England, the doctrine of *parens patriae* (the country acting as parent) held that the crown had an obligation to protect citizens who had no means of assuring their own safety and welfare. In 1817 the poet Shelley lost custody of his children as a result of his atheism and alleged reckless conduct (Herman, 1990). Thus although some English legal authorities maintained the father's absolute right to his children, others concerned with the law began to examine the issue on a case-by-case basis, some taking an interest in the quality of children's lives (Crean, 1988).

By the beginning of the 20th century there was a perceptible shift away from the absolute right of the father to a growing belief that mothers were the better parent, especially with younger children. Women began to be granted child custody. According to Luepnitz (1982), this change in custody arrangements can be attributed to three factors:

1. The Industrial Revolution which divided the male world of wage labor from the female world of home.

2. A change in the concept of childhood away from the Victorian notion that children need discipline and moral guidance to a belief that children need love and nurturance.

3. Political victories for women resulting from the very early feminist movement.

The shift from father custody to mother custody was initiated into judicial writing through The Tender Years Doctrine (Luepnitz, 1982). This doctrine was shaped by the new scientific view of maternal preference which held mothers were exclusively suited, biologically and psychologically, to raise children under seven years (Jacobs, 1986a). The Tender Years Doctrine, proposing that young children not be separated from their mothers for fear of damaging their development, dominated divorce and custody proceedings from 1900 to the mid -1960s (Myers, 1989). Consequently mother became the undisputed favorite as custodial parent. The only exception to this would be if the

mother was found to be unfit. The definition of fitness rested, in the main, upon value judgments and moral issues. Thus, if a women divorced on the grounds of having committed adultery she well may loose custody of her children. Other behaviors labeled unfit mothering included alcohol abuse or engaging in a lifestyle considered abhorrent to the court (Herman, 1990). However, for the most part, the 1938 pronouncement "there is but a twilight zone between a mother's love and the atmosphere of heaven" (Tuter v. Tuter, US Court of Appeal cited in Luepnitz, 1982) created an atmosphere in the courtroom in which giving custody to mothers was routine. The Tender Years Doctrine came to mean maternal custody with fathers serving as financial providers and disciplinarians for their children (Huntington, 1986).

From 1900 until the mid-1960s it was accepted practice that fathers were often absent from the family. There was a physical absence created by employment outside the home; and there was emotional absence (Corneau, 1991). Fathers had a diminished paternal role compared with fatherhood pre-1900. The re-defined role of father was breadwinner, head of the household. Mothers were the emotional core of the family, the unquestioned molder of young minds (Rotunda, 1987). Freud gave fathers prominence only as objects in the oedipal stage of a child's development and said little about a father's feelings. Bowlby, an English ethologist, saw mother as the first and most important object of the infant's attachment (Thompson, 1985). Such theories served to reinforce the societal assumption that a biological bond between a mother and a child makes fathers less able, less interested, and less important than mothers in caring for children.

Thus the relative absence of men from parenting coupled with the primacy of women as parents, left both men and women with a different sense of themselves and of their emotional needs.

Contemporary Perceptions on Child Custody

During the mid-1960s with the rise of the woman's movement and the changing definition of sex roles the old perspective on male parenting began to be challenged (Gerzon, 1982). Research exploring the role of father was initiated and by the early 1970s social scientists began to conclude that a father/infant bond did indeed exist (Franklin, 1984). Moreover, research indicated that the more involved fathers were during the early weeks of the child's life the more vital the bond (Jacobs, 1986a). Fathers were included in pre-natal classes and it became common practice for them to be present at the birth of their children. Out of this grew opposition to the tender years presumption. Social and legal experts began to view it as a sexist doctrine (Herman, 1990). Anthropologist Margaret Mead suggested that fathers as well as mothers could provide essential nurturing for the child (Hanson, 1988).

By the late 1970s a new process of parenting emerged that involved fathers participating in all facets of a child's life. This involvement resulted, in part, from the social movement of the time which purported that after child birth there were few tasks that could not be shared interchangeably between mother and father (Rotunda, 1987). And this new form of fatherhood required more than mere physical involvement; it required emotional involvement, encouraging fathers to share a more expressive and intimate relationship with their children than had fathers of the previous generation (Levine, 1977). Indeed, advertising images began to represent athletic men cuddling babies, middle aged males hugging their fathers; movies and television began to portray fathers looking after babies and growing children.

The effect of this new way of fathering was to blur the lines between the traditional distinctions of mothering and fathering (Roman, 1986). As fathers demonstrated that they were capable of providing good parenting for even very young children the courts gradually came to adopt a new standard for settling custody conflicts, which became known as the best interests of the child presumption (Pichitino, 1983). This assumption is

based on a philosophy that is primarily child-centered; it is concerned with the effect upon a child of being with one parent or the other.

The best interest philosophy resulted in the emergence of joint custody, a concept virtually unheard of before 1975. Joint custody refers to an arrangement in which the court recognizes both parents as having legal custody of the child with equal rights and responsibilities. Both parents share in major decisions regarding the child's growth and development. Both parents have an equal voice in planning the child's schooling, medical care, religious education, and important events in the child's life (Herman, 1990). Joint custody has become increasingly common over the past ten to fifteen years and there is now a significant body of research on the subject (Greif, 1979; Friedman, 1980; Roman, 1986; Loewen, 1988). Much of the rationale for joint custody is based on research that views the divorce experience as a series of losses for the child and notes the wisdom in minimizing further loss. In addition research has consistently shown that good father/ child relationships are important to the psychological well-being and self-esteem of children of divorce (Wallerstein, 1985; Huntington, 1986; Wallerstein & Blakesless, 1990). Significant research also indicates that, in terms of continued involvement in the parenting process, it is beneficial for a father to be able to define himself as a parent with equal rights and responsibilities (Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978).

Although it appears straight forward the term joint custody can be misleading. It refers only to legal guardianship, the right to make major decisions regarding a child's upbringing, education and religion. It does not require physical custody nor does it imply regular involvement with the child by both parents. It should not therefore be mistaken for a co-parenting arrangement, although it can and sometimes does involve that. Joint custody can exist with one parent having no physical contact with the child or it can involve fathers and mothers co-parenting with equal involvement. Joint custody presents a philosophically sound alternative to single parent custody when based upon the following:

1 - Social and legal acceptance of granting equal custody to fathers (Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978).

2 - An understanding of the significance of both parents to a child's development (Wallerstein, 1985).

3 - An increasing willingness among women to share custody of their children with their ex-husbands (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1979).

4 - A greater willingness in the society at large to experiment with different post-divorce living arrangements (Roman, 1986).

5 - A degree of mutual respect between former spouses and an ability to put the needs of the children first (Weitzman, 1988).

Joint custody, like all legal arrangements, is not a panacea. Research data suggests that children whose parents had divorced in a relatively amiable fashion do relatively well psychologically regardless of the custody arrangement (Herman, 1990). Children do not fare well if they are in a joint custody arrangement ordered by the courts over parental objections or if their parents are constantly in conflict. In other words, the psychological status of the children of divorce is related not to their custody situation but to the quality of relationship with their parents as well as to their parents relationship with each other. The lesson seems to be that no one particular custody arrangement by itself offers any distinct advantage. Ultimately success depends less upon the letter of the law than upon the good will and good faith of each parent.

## Empirical Research on Divorced Fathers

Historically divorce research has looked at the effect of divorce on children and mothers (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978). While there is considerable data regarding the situation of single mothers who have been granted sole custody and their children, there is little data regarding the single father. The traditional view of the male role assumes that men are not as emotionally upset by the termination of relationships, and that they are self-

sufficient and strong enough to take care of their own problems. Yet some studies suggest that men may be at equal or even greater risk for the negative consequences of divorce and are often less able to cope with the emotional consequences (McKenry & Price, 1990).

Until recently any research conducted on divorced fathers has focused on the concept of father absence. Father absence is defined as the tendency for some fathers to withdraw from their child's life following divorce (Weitzman, 1988). Various reasons are proposed for the tendency of some men to visit their children less and less frequently and finally, to stop paying support. A common belief is that for many men divorce not only ends the marriage but also their participation as fathers (Loewen, 1988). However, according to Dr. Edward Kruk, who has done custody research since 1985, the toll on fathers who lose custody has largely been overlooked. Indeed, contrary to popular assumptions, fathers often express their grief by further distancing themselves from their children. Findings indicate that fathers who were uninvolved with their children during marriage can adapt relatively easily to occasional access. However, for men who are active parents and identify with the role of father the consequences of divorce can be devastating. Wallerstein & Kelly (1979) found that men who had close relationships with their children often could not cope with the repeated pain of separation induced by the visitation (maternal custody) process. Studies suggest that fathers withdraw from the lives of their children as a way of dealing with the painful sense of loss (Grief, 1979). Wallerstein and Blakesless (1990) found that fathers reported persistent emotional distress associated with the artificial nature of visiting and the fact that they had little input regarding decisions that effected their children. Many men experience visits as painful because each contact renews their sense of loss - "visits" contribute to the feeling that they are no longer active fathers, no longer needed (McKenry & Price, 1990). Many men deal with their intense sadness by retreating. This form of withdrawal can quickly become a vicious cycle that leads to further loss of parental function, loss of role identification,

increased guilt, and additional alienation from children (Jacobs, 1983). Studies indicate that within five years of divorce as many as half of all non-custodial fathers completely lose contact with their children (Pruett, 1987). Thus, unlike what many children believe and what many adults conclude, the pattern of a father's visiting after divorce may well not be an accurate reflection of his love or interest.

It has not been until the last twenty-five years that divorce studies on men have extended much beyond father absence. This, it seems, was not for lack of factual information. Kessler & McRae (1984) stated that during the early 1980s the Institute for Social Research reviewed three decades of data on men's mental health and marital relationship and concluded: "Men suffer more from marital breakdown than do women. Divorced men are worse off in all areas of mental health that range from depression to various psychological impairments to nervous breakdowns, from admissions to psychiatrist facilities to suicide attempts" (p. 124).

It appears our culture has a collective investment in promoting the myth that men move through life without much feeling. Yet the consequences of an ended relationship can be as overwhelming for a man as it can for a women. During divorce men, too, struggle with major life adjustments. The rending apart of a marriage may be additionally difficult for men because, in general, the only emotional relationship men have is with their partners. Men do not talk about their troubles with each other and when they lose their partner they are suddenly stripped of their emotional connection. Contrary to the popular myth that men walk away from divorce unscathed and carefree, research indicates that many men, because of their traditional sex role socialization, are particularly vulnerable (McKenry & Price, 1990).

For the non-custodial father marital separation results in intense feelings of grief and loss (Pichitino, 1983). Feelings of loneliness and depression that accompany divorce bear a strong resemblance to the mourning process (Greif, 1979). It is the father who most often leaves the family home; it is the father who most often physically separates from the

children; and it is the father who seems to undergo greater initial changes in his self concept (Jacobs, 1983). The marital separation induces feelings of loss, previously unrecognized dependency needs, guilt, anxiety and depression in many fathers studied (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1976). Men report periods of marked depression with an overall sense that they have failed as fathers, whether or not they initiated the divorce (Keshet & Rosenthal, 1978; McKenry & Price, 1990).

Many men experience divorce as a subjective sense of abandonment and are ill prepared to deal with the narcissistic injury (Myers, 1989); they are reluctant to seek help or support (McKenry & Price, 1990). For many men in our culture, control and authority are major issues. The larger culture emphasizes the importance for a man to have control over his feelings, control over his marriage and control over his children (Jacobs, 1983). With loss of control many men may experience a new sense of impotence and frustration (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Thus many factors, both outside himself and within himself, combine to keep a man's sense of who he is unsettled and unsettling.

In our society the ideology regarding the place of men and women both at work and in the home is being re-defined. We are in the process of creating new ways of understanding gender roles. Active fathering encourages closer emotional ties to children than the traditional male role has permitted. Connecting with children and expressing emotion is challenging the stereotype that says it is not masculine to show feelings. The focus on men being more open to emotional experience is both part of and is stimulated by three related social forces (Astrachan, 1986):

1. The woman's movement.
2. The therapy subculture.
3. The increasingly difficult task of finding satisfaction in the work place and turning to family for fulfillment through relationship.

With shifting expectations around the fathering role there has also been an increased awareness at the loss of the child as experienced by the father. Greif (1979) used

the term child absence analogous to father absence to refer to the deprivation caused by the absence of one's children following divorce. As fathers become more actively involved with their children they are less willing to deny the pain of being removed from their child's life. Kaufman (1993) found that many fathers reported the experience of parenting led to their own personal growth and a belief that adults need children, just as children need adults. Erikson in his stages of psychosocial development (Corey, 1991) holds that the parenting relationship is an important stage in the identity formation of adults. When a man comes to understand that respecting his child's emotional and physical needs is equivalent to respecting his own he also recognizes his dependency on his children's love as well as their dependency on his (Colman & Colman, 1988). Such recognition marks a new maturity for many men for whom responsibility has always meant self-denial.

There is mounting evidence of the critical nature of the father-child relationship. Studies conducted over the last fifteen years conclude:

1. Fathers play an extremely important role in the development of their children (Wallerstein, 1985).

2. Children deprived of their fathers due to parental divorce miss their fathers painfully (Gilbert, 1992).

3. Withdrawal of a parent following divorce has a negative impact on a child's sense of security (Kingma, 1993).

4. Divorced fathers often suffer from the loss of their children and, like their children, do better when there is continued contact following divorce (Wallerstein & Blakesless, 1990).

Concluding Notes

The legal evolution of child custody can be traced from early times when children were viewed as possessions of the father and the mother's rights were almost non-existent; to a time when child custody was defined by the Tender Years Doctrine which held that

mothers were the most suited parent, both biologically and psychologically, to raise children; to the current situation that awards child custody in accordance with the best interests of the child. The concept of joint custody has arisen from the best interests philosophy. Joint custody allows each parent, following the marital breakdown, to continue to have equal responsibility in the important decisions effecting the child's life. It becomes apparent that the concept of custody involves more than a child care contract. It carries with it all sorts of political and social views relating to male-female identity and to the division of labor between the sexes.

Despite the fact that joint custody has become common legal practice Statistics Canada, 1992 figures, covering both legally contested and uncontested custody cases, show mothers have sole custody 72% of the time; fathers have sole custody 12% of the time; and joint custody is awarded 16% of the time. The bias of judges toward maternal preference traditionally has been and remains strong (McKentry & Price, 1990).

The cultural assumption that a man's parenting role is less important than a woman's separates men from their children. Most men don't have a close physical relationship with their sons or daughters much past infancy. Many men have a difficult time expressing feelings and the lack of physical contact only serves to exaggerate their felt sense of distance from their children (Kigma, 1993). Thus, in time, fathers can become vague, shadowy, one-dimensional figures in their children's life. Nowhere is the male separation from children more poignantly visible than in divorce. When families are shattered it is most often the father who must embrace the pain of losing his children. While there are many grueling implications in divorce for women the plight of men is often completely ignored. Men are often accused of not caring about their children, of abandoning them, of not being involved in their lives. Yet all studies indicate that men are acutely aware of the loss when they are deprived of daily contact with their children. When the continuity of a father's relationship with his children is interrupted his ability to perceive himself as a loving parent is also damaged (Kingman, 1993).

Recently men have begun to challenge the myth that children belong to their mothers by participating in the process of child birth, acknowledging their role in creating this new life, and making a decision for an expanded involvement with their children. Although it is encouraging that many men are seeking deeper relationships with their children there is still a long way to go in revising both our conscious and unconscious beliefs. Despite the gradual realization that attainment of women's rights is dependent upon changes in men's roles, our society continues to hold mother as the primary nurturing figure in the child's development. Moreover, the number of men committed to active fathering remains relatively small. They are, for the most part, educated upper middle class men. These men travel an unfamiliar path. Their sense of self as men is at risk, for if these men desire quality relationships with partners and children the trade-off is that they must be willing to reduce the emphasis on achievement and success in the outer world (Johnson & Ferguson, 1990). To grow, to change, to transform old definitions takes time, commitment and the latitude to make errors and feel both confused and conflicted.

Ironically divorce may also help men expand the nature of involvement with their children. Often for men it is the female - wives, mothers, daughters - who establishes and maintains nurturing, and mutually interactive family and friendship ties. Mom is the one most likely to arrange the family social calendar, buy gifts, and remember special occasions. Dad often ends up participating in a social world that is arranged for him (Johnson & Ferguson, 1990). With divorce mothers cease to function as interpreters of the children; they cease to co-ordinate the social schedule. Interestingly, research indicates that divorced men may feel closer to their children and are more knowledgeable about them than when they lived as a family (Robinson & Barret, 1986; Weitzman, 1988).

We live in a time of considerable social change. Many men are beginning to sense that fatherhood may be the most mysterious and fulfilling journey they can make (Louv, 1993). Increasing numbers of men strive for balance in their lives. They are challenging the concept of masculinity, of what it means to be a man. There is richness, complexity

and multiplicity to all experience and to foster the notion that one mode of being is right while denying other aspects of self becomes an obsolete way of thinking. All men and all women function with both male and female aspects. As health and growth depend on both dark and light so maturity depends on inner balance. The words of balance - yin/yang; Shatki/Shiva; being/doing are not gender bound (Woodman, 1992).

# CHAPTER THREE

## Tactics of Inquiry

> Methodology includes and is reflective of the inquirer's view of knowledge, general orientation to life, and sense of what it is to be human. Method, on the other hand, includes the mode of inquiry - the way the pursuit of knowledge will be carried out . (Van Manen, 1990)

This chapter outlines the ethnographic process I followed as I explored the research question - "What is the experience of men who remain actively involved in the parenting role following divorce?" This chapter discusses the researcher as a human instrument and as an ethnographer. It looks at the identification and selection of informants and at the perception of the informant as a teacher, a native speaker, essential to understanding the cultural scene. The chapter concludes by detailing both the ethnographic interview and ethnographic analysis as they apply to this study.

Ethnography may be defined as the systematic process of observing, documenting and analyzing a culture (Leininger, l985). Ethnography is both process, a way of studying human life and product, an analytic description of intact cultural groups (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). It is both craft and art for it attempts to learn what knowledge people use to organize their behavior, to understand themselves, and to make sense of their world. Essentially ethnography is the work of discovering and describing a culture. It includes the emic, or the native perspective which lies at the heart of the research and the etic perspective which is the external social/scientific perspective. Refer to Appendix C for a complete definition of ethnographic terms.

Culture may be thought of as the knowledge people use to generate and interpret social behavior. This knowledge is, in part, learned and, to a degree, shared (Spradley,

1979). Culture teaches its inhabitants to see the world in a particular way; to recognize and identify some objects while ignoring others. Culture comprises the knowledge and beliefs that characterize a particular group of people. This definition is based on the premise that we all live in co-created cultures of reality (Spradley, 1979).

Cultural knowledge is not always readily observed. A large part of any culture consists of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge may be described as knowledge that is outside conscious awareness; knowledge that is taken for granted. Tacit knowledge is often revealed through speech, both in casual comments and during lengthy interviews (Spradley, 1979). In doing ethnographic research it is incumbent upon the researcher to ask not, "What do I see these people doing?" but rather to ask "What do these people see themselves doing?" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972).

Ethnographic research attempts to capture lived experience by entering into the world of the informant (Denzin, 1989a). The aim is to understand another way of life, to learn what knowledge people use to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense of the world in which they live (Spradley, 1979). Thus rather than merely study people, the essence of ethnography is to learn from them.

In this study I have explored the experience of men who continue to actively parent following the dissolution of their marriage by examining the culture of four men who remain involved with their children in a nurturing capacity following divorce. This study is not intended to be representative of men's experience of parenting following divorce. However some understandings about four men who continue in an active parenting role following divorce have emerged.

## The Researcher

> Knowledge is never about something: It emerges as an on-going, self-referencing construction. Knowledge is part of lived experience and we must study lived experience to gain understanding. (Van Manen, 1990)

All research is, to some degree, influenced by the presence of the researcher. According to Denzin (1989a) the researcher is the primary instrument on which qualitative research depends for acquisition of data. The researcher is not an invisible, anonymous voice of authority but a real individual with specific desires and interests (Harding, 1987). Van Manen (1990) writes of the connection between researcher and informant, between subjectivity and objectivity. "The researcher needs to be perceptive, insightful and discerning in order to depict the findings in their full richness and depth" (p. 21). For me a certain awareness was achieved the research through my focusing both on process and content. At times, it took effort and work to discover where my values, opinions, beliefs came from; to sort out what was mine and what belonged to the informant; to grasp that what was not being said was often more important than what was spoken. An essential learning that emerged during this work was that self awareness and research are, on some level, reciprocal. Self awareness is not only necessary for quality research but the research itself is a potent source of self awareness.

The ability to understand another's reality comes about through a caring relationship - care for the self, for the informant and for the space that holds what is spoken. Strauss & Corbin (1990) refer to this as theoretical sensitivity. It is imperative that as a researcher, I conduct my study prepared to hone my ability to develop insight and understanding; my capacity to find meaning; and my skill to separate what is relevant from what is not. This is done in a conceptual rather than concrete realm and for me, this is the creative aspect of the work. It is the heart of the research process.

## Impetus for the Study

I have, for many years now, been fascinated by the differences between men and women, and how these difference have been culturally embodied in what is commonly referred to as gender roles. I have often questioned the belief that men are linear, logical, left brain thinkers while women are intuitive, creative and right brained. Indeed, there is

no evidence that men and women are inherently different in their intuitive capacities. The popular belief that women are more intuitive than men is related to the fact that women in our society are not taught to repress feelings as much as men. Little boys are taught early not to cry and not to be emotional. Conversely little girls may escape some of the rigorous training in rational intellectual development which is stressed for boys (Vaughan, 1979).

In the midst of exploring possible thesis topics around men's and women's ways of knowing I was reading Marion Woodman's Leaving my father's house. Woodman (1992) speaks of a new order of reality, of the eternal feminine trusting her way into contemporary consciousness.

> "Many people are currently alone, suffering radical upheavals in their lives without support. It is regrettable that contemporary men's stories of evolving femininity are not common. In fairy tales the heroine personifies the feminine in men and women. Our physical maps are similar. Men who are trying to live out their soul values in our culture are challenged and mocked in ways that women need to contemplate" (p. 57).

My work as a counsellor has involved working with men going through the process of divorce. I have often been touched by the pain these men express around the loss of their children, particularly in light of a common view that a divorced father is an absent father. I began to ponder how these men, who were attempting to live out sensitive, egalitarian values, understood the relationship they experienced with their children, specifically following divorce and all the attendant ramifications. I was curious by Woodman's term "conscious femininity" and decided to focus my work on men's experience of parenting following divorce. In part because people's stories help us to understand them and understanding them helps us to accept them as part of ourselves. The ability to understand self is central to a counselling paradigm. I choose this focus for my work because a large part of me wished to imagine a Utopian ideal: A life world in which men not only raised children, but were raised to raise them so that even men who

were not fathers, like women who are not mothers, developed an awareness that fostered better connections with others.

Influence of the Researcher's Role

Much has been written about the need to suspend judgment, to bracket one's assumptions while conducting qualitative research (Leininger, 1985; Osborne, 1990). The intended purpose is to remain conscious of one's presuppositions and not allow them to influence the study. Other literature argues that attempting to achieve 'objectivity' is based on a false premise. Some literature suggests that subjectivity should not be considered a limitation; personal responses to the area under study can be capitalized upon as a rich source of data (Lipson, 1991). While it is useful to consider conscious concerns and biases and how they impact one's study I believe that it is more important to understand that the role of researcher is neither linear nor frozen. It moves and changes as the research process unfolds. Nothing or no one holds still long enough to provide for an accurate and complete description. The world changes and changes us, even as we make our observations and recordings (Cottle, 1977).

In terms of understanding how the researcher's role influences the research it seems essential to understand the researcher's view of knowledge and her sense of what it is to be human.

I believe each person is unique and possesses an evolving psychological structure which includes all that they are born with and all that they acquire. This evolving psychological structure is the medium through which experience is interpreted and given meaning. The truth for any individual is always in context of their evolving psychological structure (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Therefore, numerous interpretations or multiple realities exist, all of which are equally valid. Cottle (1977) makes the point that awareness of an individual is preferable to classifying them because classifying people "reveals neither the truth nor the substance of lived experience" (p. 78). The fact is no one can speak for

someone else. Human beings are not objects whose behavior can be observed and analyzed. Human beings are intentional agents whose consciousness of themselves and of the world they live in forms an inextricable feature of everything they think, say and do (Lorraine, 1990).

The act of investigation means that the researcher and the person studied assume roles. Each person in this process constructs a definition of what is going on. It is therefore essential the researcher be aware of herself, observe and record her thoughts, movements, emotions and sensations (Spradley, 1979). Following each interview, and at times between interviews, I recorded my reflections in a separate notebook and referred to them throughout the analyzing/ writing process. This journal recorded my thoughts, impressions, feelings as well as some of the events and conversations that took place during the research. Journaling was useful in helping me focus on aspects of the informant's lives that I otherwise may not have appreciated. For example, during interviews difficulties some men experienced with their former partners and arrangements around the child/ren arose in various forms. While I intellectually understood the conflict I didn't feel it during the interview itself. A fuller understanding emerged as I worked the material. I became aware of how the informants still struggle with their situation. Recording and reflecting in the written form reminded me of those struggles. The journal provided me with deep insight into the informant's situation; more importantly it helped me to remain in touch with my own feelings.

There is no formula and there are no conclusive words to accurately describe the influence of the researcher's role on the research process. It involves the researcher's view of knowledge; her general orientation to life and to people; her self observation; her self awareness; and her ability to record feelings as well as thoughts. Perhaps the most useful understanding of the researcher's influence on the work lies in comprehending what the researcher hopes to achieve by conducting the study. Thus it is my hope this study will not merely offer insight into what it means to father following divorce at this point in time

from the perspective of four men but that the reader will feel new knowledge as the life stories of these men and their experience evokes personal reflection and emotion. In other words, knowing is itself an experience (Harding, 1987).

## The Informant

Ethnography explores the experience of individuals, known as key informants, who are a part of the culture under study. Informants are experts in understanding the culture. They are the source of information and become teachers for the ethnographer (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). The emic perspective - the insider or native perspective is central to ethnographic study. The informant's perception is instrumental in understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviors (Fetterman, 1989).

Denzin (1989a) indicates that interpretive studies begin with a meaningful event that transforms a life. Focus is then given to uncovering how people live out this experience in daily life. In the present study the meaningful event is divorce and the subsequent change in the parenting role. It is my intention to examine how parenting following divorce is lived and interpreted in daily life by exploring the stories of four men. In ethnographic terms these men would be referred to as informants. Denzin (1989a) describes informants as individuals who:

1) Trust the investigator.

2) Give freely of information.

3) Accept information as given by the investigator.

## Identifying the Informant

According to Spradley (1979) a main challenge of ethnography is to initiate, develop and maintain a productive relationship with the informant. He is specific in his criteria for identifying informants. As well as current involvement Spradley recommends that informants have a minimum of one year full time participation in the cultural scene.

This ensures adequate time for enculturation - the natural process of learning a particular culture. Spradley further suggests informants are made aware of the time involved and commit to this. Finally he states that the informant should not be prone to self analysis. Because the ethnographer's intent is to discover patterns of meaning in what an informant says it is best if informants do not analyze their own culture.

When selecting informants for this study I followed Spradley's suggestions. However, I set a minimum of two year involvement in the cultural scene because studies on divorce indicate that it is at the end of two years that conflict and attachment between ex-spouses decrease and the effects of divorce are substantially less (Jacobs, 1982). All informants readily agreed to commit to the time required of them and all noted a desire to share their story as the primary reason for involvement with this study:

> I wanted to do this because I think there is a new evolution of maleness and parenting. I think that there are new norms being made and that I offer some, either role modeling or, I think .... there is a lot more men that care than the average, the societal norm of the Disneyland dad or whatever. That is there. I would hate for someone to do a study on fathers' parenting and not have a fair and balanced perception. (Alex)

Finally, I consciously chose men who were self reflective in their own lives although not necessarily aware of themselves as members of a specific sub-culture. I felt a self reflective quality was essential in getting at the process of how they made meaning of themselves as a single father, a role not readily sanctioned by the larger culture.

## The Participants

Four divorced men actively engaged in the parenting role volunteered to be informants for this study. I approached the first informant, an acquaintance of mine, to serve as the pilot interviewee. The three remaining informants heard of the study by word of mouth. One was involved in an intensive, year long lay counsellor training program and

heard of the study from a colleague. He agreed to participate. Another heard of the study in a discussion at a men's group he attends regularly and indicated a willingness to become involved. And a third informant heard of the study through a mutual acquaintance and demonstrated an interest in participating. All informants were willing participants, interested in sharing their story for the purpose of the study.

I made initial contact with each of the informants by telephone at which time the nature of the study and the objectives of the research were communicated. Repeating the intention of the research was an on-going process throughout the study. Further, I explained the voluntary aspect of their participation and voiced my appreciation of the willingness to share their experiences. I emphasized to each informant their role as teacher. I voiced my wish to understand their world; to know it as they know it; to fathom the meaning of their experience. All interviews were conducted between 15. February, 1995 and 25. May, 1995. Each informant was advised that the study involved two separate interviews, each lasting somewhere between one and three hours.

Personal data provides a contextual frame of reference (de Rivera, 1981). Thus specific biographical information (Appendix B) was requested from each informant before beginning the first interview. This provided me with a chronological and contextual map; it was also helpful to informants in recalling events. Glaser and Straus (1967) suggest that minimizing obvious differences among the participants increases the possibility that the researcher will collect similar data on a given category and discover important differences. Accordingly I equalized the study to some degree by choosing informants between the ages of 35-55, who had, at minimum, a post-secondary education as well as experience in either individual or group counselling.

Spradley (1979) is specific regarding the need and importance of providing the informant with complete confidentiality and privacy. Each informant signed a letter of informed consent (Appendix A) prior to the start of any interview. This form outlined both the intent and method of maintaining confidentiality, it also stressed the voluntary

nature of the participation. In addition I explained to each informant that I would use pseudonyms in field notes and in the final work; that I would keep the audio tapes in a locked drawer in my office and destroy them upon completion of the work. I explained that I would either alter or delete any identifying information. Throughout the research process I remained mindful not to reveal the identity of any informant. Spradley (1979) specifies that confidentiality of the informants is a priority and that throughout the research the ethnographer must continually ask herself "How can I maintain the anonymity of my informants?" (p. 38). Spradley also makes note of what he refers to as a fair return for informants time and energy. "Every ethnographer bears a responsibility to weigh carefully what might constitute a fair return to informants" (p. 38). As previously noted all informants expressed an interest in sharing their story. I believe the act of listening, recording and analyzing individual experience helped give meaning to each informant's expression. The felt sense of being heard, as I was told and as I know, was useful for these men in terms of furthering/ understanding their individual process.

## The Ethnographic Interview

The bulk of data for this study was gleaned from interviews with each of the four informants. Language is pivotal to all ethnographic research and according to Spradley (1979) an ethnographic interview is a particular kind of speech event. Words help clarify personal experience; they act as a major, although not singular, means to understand the experience of others. Since the goal of ethnography is to describe a culture in its own terms the ethnographer seeks to encourage informants to speak in the same way they would talk with others in their culture. The ethnographic interview may be thought of as a series of friendly conversations in which the researcher slowly introduces new elements in order to assist the informant to respond as an informant (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). From this perspective it is essential that the ethnographer develop a rapport with the informant in order to elicit cultural information as the informant understands it to be.

The Pilot Interview

Conducting a pilot interview is recommended before beginning the actual project in order to become acquainted with the culture and language of the informants (Becker, 1986). A pilot study is also useful in learning to familiarize oneself with ethnographic method.

As previously noted I approached an acquaintance who fitted my selection criteria and asked if he would participate in the study as the pilot interviewee. He agreed and we set up an initial interview that lasted two hours. The interview was held in my office and was audio taped, as well I made various notations throughout. Prior to the second interview I transcribed and analyzed the initial meeting according to Spradley's design. The second interview occurred two weeks later and lasted some two and a half hours.

Spradley holds that there are three important elements in the ethnographic interview. The first is explicit purpose. It is important that the researcher direct the interview in order to move toward fulfilling the goal of gathering data. It is equally important that the researcher develop rapport with the informant. In line with this I gave on-going explanations regarding the ethnographic process so that the pilot informant could understand himself as a "teacher" of his experience. Throughout I attempted to convey a felt sense as myself as an outsider attempting to enter the cultural world of the single father as he understood it to be. It is essential that the ethnographer convey to informants their lack of cultural knowledge and desire to understand the native language. Two questions I asked were:

> So, if you were to be a fly on the wall, listening to a group of men talking of their experience going through divorce and staying connected with their kids what do you think they would say to each other?
>
> For men in a parenting situation similar to yours what do you think their concerns would be, what would they talk about?

The second important element as defined by Spradley is ethnographic explanation. Ethnographic explanation includes (1) project explanation or describing the study; (2) recording explanation or explaining how and why the researcher records the conversation; (3) native language explanation or reinforcing the informants describing the cultural scene in their own way; and (4) interview explanation which offers a rationale for the way questions are presented. For example, when asking a contrast question I prefaced it with the following:

> In ethnography part of how you make meaning is by contrasting things that are very close together so you can then understand the subtle differences. A kind of meaning then emerges. Those three things - nursing her; being like a mother; and creating a bond are not exactly the same although they share many similar qualities.

The third important element in ethnographic interviewing as presented by Spradley are ethnographic questions. He identifies over thirty kinds of questions. However for the purpose of this study, I focused on three basic types of questions - descriptive, structural and contrast questions.

Conducting a pilot interview was a useful process. It offered the opportunity to work with Spradley's research design. I became familiar with the ethnographic method in a "hands on" way. As I began to work with the various pieces I began to see them as part of a pattern. This view was helpful in deciphering what areas needed to be explored in greater depth. Issues of confidentiality, protecting the integrity of the informant, offering ethnographic explanations and learning to use descriptive, contrast and structural questions were all practiced and became somewhat familiar. While conducting a pilot interview gave me exposure to much of the ethnographic design the most significant result was a sense of confidence and understanding around ethnography as a research method.

Interviews with Informants.

Following completion of the pilot interview I completed a total of six interviews with the remaining three informants. With one exception, all interviews took place in the informant's home. Spradley (1979) recommends that interviewing occur in a location familiar to the informant as a way to build rapport and gather contextual information. Van Manen (1990) speaks to the concept of spatiality (lived space) and suggests that we become the space we are in. Thus home is a special place which is connected to one's fundamental sense of being. Home is where we can be what we are.

The process of the informant interviews was similar to that of the pilot interview. Confidentiality and anonymity were addressed. The basic elements of ethnographic interviewing - explicit purpose, ethnographic explanation and ethnographic questioning were followed. I transcribed each tape myself then analyzed it before proceeding to the second interview.

In addition to audio taping the entire session I would often jot down significant words, phrases, reactions, feelings during the interview. Following each meeting I would methodically record my thoughts, feelings and senses in some detail. Often between interviews, I would make additional entries in my field journal. In many ways journaling became a paradoxical experience for me. Throughout the process of this ethnographic research, language - the words we choose to use, took on a new significance for me. I came to understand words as symbols that imply more than just the obvious and immediate meaning. I was dealing with a complex, emotional topic. While I was relying on words to convey the essence of the experience it became increasingly clear to me that the fullness of the experience I sought to discover could never be fully captured by words. I began to see each informant as a text of sorts, as were his stories, his ideas, his memories and wishes and desires. Like any rich text there were many, many layers of meaning to the stories the informants relayed.

As I began to contemplate describing these experiences, words which I had come to cherish as so laden with meaning became dangerously limiting. My challenge became to approach the informant with a fully engaged imagination, explore contradiction while simultaneously knowing this experience would ultimately require a final synthesis into words. Spradley (1979), in his own way, addressed this as he spoke of the importance of written notes. "The major part of any ethnographic record consists of written field notes whether observations, interviews, records, diaries, or other personal documents" (p. 70). Spradley also speaks of difficulty in the translation process, in bridging the gap between discovery (the informant view) and description (the ethnographic text).

Ethnographic Questions

All interviews share some generic kinds of questions. The most common types are survey questions, specific questions, and open-ended or closed-ended questions. Survey questions, or what Spradley & McCurdy (1972) called grand tour questions, are designed to elicit a broad picture of the informant's world, to map the cultural terrain. Specific questions explore these topics in more detail. Open-ended and closed-questions help discover and clarify the informant's experience and perception. Ethnographic research requires moving back and forth between types of questions. The ethnographer must maintain a delicate balance of questioning throughout the study. In general, however, survey questions occur during the early part of the research, specific questions during the middle and final stages of the study (Fetterman, 1989).

Ethnographic interviewing differs from other forms of interviewing in that it assumes that the question-answer sequence is a single element in human thinking. In other words, questions imply answers and statements imply questions. It is the task of the interviewer to discover both questions and answers from the informant. In order to discover cultural knowledge, the researcher must learn the ways in which informants view their world. The task of the ethnographer is to learn how cultural knowledge is used, not

what is 'means' . To this end Spradley (1979) outlines descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. I will address how these specific questions were employed in the study.

Descriptive Questions

Descriptive questions form the basis of all ethnographic interviews. Informants are invited to describe an aspect of their life in as much detail as possible. Descriptive questions are used to collect a sample of the informant's language and to gain insight into aspects of the informant's culture (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). They are easy to ask, are continually used in all interviews, and expand as information is obtained.

The following are taken from the transcribed ethnographic text and illustrate various types of descriptive questioning used in this study:

General Descriptive Question
If I were to film you and your daughter having breakfast together what would be the essence of what my camera would capture? Could you describe that scene for me?

Descriptive Elaboration Question
Could you say more about how you experience strong, positive women?

Descriptive Example Question
You said that one of your tasks following the separation was to fill up the hole for yourself so that "I would survive, not just survive but I would be alright." Could you describe some of the ways, some examples of how you learned to fill up that hole for yourself?

Descriptive Self-philosophy Question
You said that following the separation you were aware that your children still needed your guidance but that you felt they weren't receptive to receiving it from you because of the lack of your presence in their lives at that time. You also said that when the three of you were together you just wanted to have a "nice experience". Could you tell me about some of the

ways you were able to offer the guidance you felt was required while also meeting your need that the time spent together be a nice experience?

Descriptive Mini-tour Question

In the first interview you described how you loved being a parent, you used phrases such as: "I love watching the kids; I love having them with me; I love their sense of wonder and openness - it energizes me." So this is a lot of the "up" side of being a father, could you speak a little about how the flip side of being a father is for you?

Descriptive Native Language Question

So how would you say it? How would you refer to a man who looses all contact with his children following his divorce?

Descriptive Task-related Question

Some of the ways to parent for you include: "I am starting to be real with her; I am cutting her slack; I am seeing my own pattern in her. I talk with her step dad, it is important to me that I understand how she deals with others." Could you describe for me how you are real with her?

Structural Questions

Structural questions are used to discover how informants organize their knowledge. They are based on the principle that discovering similarities between terms and phrases leads to an understanding of meaning (Spradley, 1979). For example, during my conversation with Eric we discussed the custody arrangements for his daughter. In order to understand how he experienced the custody arrangement I asked a structural question:

Interviewer:

So when you spoke of the custody arrangements you said that you felt it would be good for your daughter to live her mom, that she needed to be with her.

Eric:

Yes, I thought so at the time.

Interviewer:

> So if it is good for your daughter to be with her mom what else about the arrangement is good for her?

Eric:

> That we were both in the same community, that is a big one. The agreement itself, that there be a standard pattern of visitation and what not. In other words, I had access to my daughter every other weekend. She knew exactly when she could expect to see me and the same thing with holidays, taking turns. A sense of fairness there actually.

Interviewer:

> So could you say more about a sense of fairness?

I asked a descriptive question here. Spradley (1979) suggests asking structural questions concurrently with descriptive questions. "The concurrent principle means that it is best to alternate the various types of questions. Structural questions complement rather than replace descriptive questions" (p. 121). Spradley also suggests using the repetition principal and the native language principle. When posing the structural question I used the informant's phrase "good for her" three times.

Use of structural questions elicits similarities between folk terms (words/ phrases used by members of the culture under study). This discovery principle underlies both taxonomic and domain analysis; both these terms will be discussed in the section on ethnographic analysis.

Contrast Question

Contrast questions are used to discover meanings of and relationships between the words and phrases that informants use (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The contrast principle is based on the assumption that the meaning of a concept with a given category is understood by specifying what it contrasts with (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). While Spradley outlines seven types of contrast questions (Appendix G). I utilized three types throughout the study. These questions proved useful in clarifying not only explicit

knowledge but tacit meaning. The following explanations and verbatim interactions illustrate how the three kinds of contrast questions were used when interviewing informants:

Dyadic Contrast Questions

Informants are asked to described differences between two terms. It is useful to note that the ethnographer asks the question without any suggestion, the informant is then free to reveal contrasts that are meaningful in his own terms:

Interviewer:

> You have said that, particularly during the child's early years, the mother's role is more influential than the father's but not more important. Could you tell me how influential is different from important?

Philip:

> Well, influential has to do with effect, a mother is around the younger child more, does more of the daily care kinds of things and so in that immediate sense she is more effectual. Also, and this has to do more with the female role. Women have a more influential role in a young child's life. For example, you rarely see a man working in a pre-school or day care. If you did, well you'd think there was something 'wrong' with him. Fathers are important in that they kind of take care of things. I guess you would say they provide. It also has to do with culture, with how we were brought up. If you went back a couple of generations you would find that men did not, under almost any circumstance have a part to play in the daily care of the child. Men worked long hours and just didn't see their kids much. This is not what I think the roles should be or how I want to father but it is what has been handed down.

Triadic Contrast Questions

Triadic questions ask for both similarity and difference. This type of question makes explicit an ethnographic belief that difference always implies similarity.
Interviewer:

When you talked about your ex-wife becoming pregnant you said that you started to get serious; you got married; and you got protective.

Alex:

Yes.

Interviewer:

So of those three - started to get serious; got married; and got protective; which two are most alike and which one is different?

Alex:

Got serious and got married are synonymous. Becoming protective is the different one. That's not attaching value, that is just saying that they are different.

Interviewer:

So could you tell me how becoming protective is different from getting married and getting serious?

Alex:

It seems like the other two are external, doing the right thing and getting married are external sorts of societal things. Becoming protective is internal, sort of based on belief. The other two are based on values.

Rating Questions:

Asking rating questions helps discover the value the informant places on a set of symbols from the same category:

Interviewer:

You mentioned that following the separation your relationship with your daughter changed in many ways. You said that you are more able to be who you are with her; that there is no conflict or interference in the relationship; and that there is a calm environment. Could you rate those changes from what you consider to be as most important to the one you consider least important?

Eric:

> Well it is difficult to rate those things because they are all interrelated. But ..... being able to be who I am is the most important. It allows my relationship to my daughter to be authentic, to be real. And then I guess because of all the conflict in the marriage calmness is really important. Because of where we came from. It is a lot calmer now and I think because it is calm she can be who she is, and I can be who I am.

Ethnographic questions illustrate how an informant classifies and organizes his reality. Various types of questions are juxtaposed throughout the interview and Spradley suggests advising the informant of the intended change in questioning. This assists in establishing rapport. For example, the researcher may say, "I'd like to ask you a different kind of question now, will that be all right with you?" Making the informant aware of the process followed is fundamental to ethnographic research and displays positive regard toward the informant as he shares his world with the researcher.

Ethnographic Analysis

Analysis refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole (Spradley, 1979). Ethnographic analysis is based on the premise that an informant's cultural knowledge is more than random bits of information. Knowledge is organized into categories, all of which are systematically related to the entire culture. Ethnographic analysis is a means to discover how this categorization occurs by dividing the terms and phrases used by informants into units (domains) and then demonstrating how the units are similar to and different from one and another (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Ethnographic analysis has no single form or stance; multiple analysis is essential and takes place continuously throughout the research (Fetterman, 1989).

A cultural group's patterns of thought and behavior are interwoven strands (Lipson, 1991). The task of the ethnographer is to build a firm knowledge base cyclically. In conducting this ethnographic study I found a need to continuously ask questions,

compare, contrast, synthesize and evaluate. As one pattern is identified another pattern emerges for analysis and identification (Thomas, 1993). The level of understanding increases geometrically as the ethnographer mixes and matches patterns, building theory from the ground up (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While there were times in the research process when I felt overwhelmed by bits and pieces of seemingly disconnected material I slowly began to see patterns, themes emerge. Things took a shape and I began to grasp an understanding of the culture under study.

The Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) developed by Spradley utilizes fours types of analysis: 1) Domain analysis 2) Taxonomic analysis 3) compotential analysis and 4) Thematic analysis. These four analytic methods will be discussed in turn.

Domain Analysis

All language contains a vast number of terms people use in referring to their experience. In ethnography words used to describe things, events, and qualities are referred to as folk terms. Folk terms make up the vocabulary of a typical dictionary. These terms are linked together in speech by what Spradley refers to as semantic relationships. For example in a special context one may merely say "house", however in common usage house is usually linked to another concept; where one lives (That is my house); where one is going (I am going over to her house) etc. A semantic relationship that is common to every culture is inclusion (Spradley, 1979). A domain is a unit of cultural knowledge with a single semantic relationship. Examples of a domain with the semantic relationship of inclusion (X is a kind of Y) would be: Oak (included term) is a kind of tree (cover term); or coparenting (included term) is a kind of custody arrangement (cover term). Cultural meaning is created through linking terms. In discovering how terms are linked an ethnographer is able to understand how a culture organizes its symbols. Spradley (1979) proposes nine universal semantic relationships (Appendix D).

Following each interview I pursued the text for domains using Spradley's list of semantic relationships. The criteria I used when choosing domains to study were (1) the frequency with which an informant referred to a specific topic and (2) experiences relevant to counsellor education (Banister, 1991). I then formulated structural questions based on the information from this initial domain analysis. During the subsequent interviews I was able to use these questions to confirm or disconfirm hypothesized domains and the accuracy of my analysis.

Taxonomic Analysis

Similar to a domain a taxonomy is a set of categories organized on the basis of a single semantic relationship. A taxonomy differs from a domain in that it shows the relationships among all the terms. It reveals subsets of terms and the way in which subsets relate to the domain as a whole. Thus a taxonomic analysis involves constructing a taxonomy which reveals the contents of each domain as well as shows how terms are related to each other and to the domain as a whole. Taxonomies may be multi-leveled (Spradley, 1979).

From the pilot interview I began my taxonomic analysis by creating a substitution frame (Spradley, 1979):

_ The domain was 'remaining an active parent'.

_ The semantic relationship was 'I remain an active parent for several important reasons.

_ The underlying semantic relationship is rationale (X is a reason for doing Y).

_ The substitution frame is-------is a reason for active parenting.

Then using the substitution frame I searched for possible subsets among the included terms. By reviewing field notes, my field journal and interview data I searched for larger domains that may include as a subset the domain being analyzed. I constructed a tentative taxonomy for formulating structural questions to verify the relationships and

elicit new terms at the next interview. Following this process I completed the taxonomy (Figure 1). It is important to recognize that taxonomies always approximate the way informants have organized their cultural knowledge (Spradley, 1979). Figures 2-4 illustrate taxonomies that were constructed to represent an aspect of each of the informants cultural knowledge.

Componential Analysis

Domain and taxonomic analysis focus on similarities. Componential analysis searches for contrasts associated with cultural symbols. Pieces of information that people use to distinguish differences between terms are called attributes. For example, a dog is a member of the domain animal. However a dog has many attributes that distinguish it from other animals. A dog is domesticated; a dog can be used for guarding; a dog can be used to help the blind; a dog is considered man's best friend etc. Componential analysis involves a search for attributes associated with all the terms in a category (Banister, 1991).

Almost every contrast question reveals additional information about folk terms. It is not possible to place all the terms in a taxonomy because of the different semantic relationships revealed through contrast questions (Spradley, 1979). Componential analysis (Figures 6 -7) illustrate a single folk term with some of the attributes. These figures show how each attribute is connected to the term by a variety of semantic relationships.

A paradigm, which is a graphic representation of attributes, both distinguishes members of a contrast set and shows multiple semantic relationships. The steps involved in completing a componential analysis include searching for and sorting out contrasts; grouping together some dimensions of contrast; and entering this information on a paradigm worksheet. Figure 5 is an example of the componential analysis of embracing self as a single father completed on Alex. Terms from the category to be contrasted are placed vertically on the left hand column (the contrast set) and the attributes or values, associated with these terms are placed horizontally along the top of the column. This

visual representation of the informant's cultural understanding is a useful tool for uncovering themes (Banister, 1991).

In every culture people learn ways to define their world and these complex systems of perception involve both similarities and difference. As we begin to perceive attributes or values in relationship to each other we can gain an increased understanding of the informant's cognitive reality (Spradley, 1979).

Thematic Analysis

A cultural theme is a cognitive principle, tacit or explicit, recurrent in a number of domains and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning (Spradley, 1979). A cognitive principle is something one believes true and valid, it is an assumption about the nature of one's experience. Cognitive principals, or cultural beliefs, are usually in the form of assertions (Spradley, 1979). For example, Philip's statement, "I did love my father yet I know, I really know, I don't want to be the kind of father to my children that he was to me" is an assertion that can be generalized to how each man in this study understood his experience of being fathered (Banister, 1991).

Themes come to be taken for granted, they slip into that area of knowledge where people seldom find the need to express what they know. Indeed, it is cited many times that the majority of cultural themes exist at the tacit level ( Spradley, 1979; Hycner, 1985; Fetterman, 1989). Thus the search for themes involves identifying those cognitive principles that appear again and again.

Thematic analysis - searching for overviews of the cultural scene that convey a sense of the whole - was an on-going process throughout the study. In combing for cultural themes I: (1) searched for organizing domains that were, on some level, representative of all the informants' experience; (2) compared and contrasted various domains by examining any relationships between them; (3) constructed componential analysis of informant's descriptions; and (4) created thematic diagrams representing

informant's cultural knowledge. The visual representation of parts and their relationship to the whole proved extremely valuable in comprehending the flow of cultural use and understanding.

In this process of thematic analysis the greatest challenge was to distinguish essence from experience. It is crucial when determining the universal qualities of a culture to differentiate between essential themes and themes that are more incidentally related to the culture under study (Van Manen, 1990).

## Credibility

Establishing credibility is an on-going process in ethnographic analysis (Spradley, 1979). During this study I employed two specific methods to address the issue of credibility. First, during the interview process I asked each informant to verify the hypothesized domains that I had drawn from the transcribed text. Secondly, upon completion of transcribing the interviews and analyzing all the data I contacted each informant and presented my findings. Each informant was given an opportunity to pursue what had been transcribed, analyzed and concluded in written form. Each informant was invited to challenge, to clarify, or to add to the information as he saw fit.

## Concluding Notes

Ethnographic method is based on the assumption that cultural meaning is uncovered through an examination of how people use language (Banister, 1991). The task of the ethnographer is to interpret the cognitive understanding of the cultural scene with as little distortion as possible. Thus ethnographic writing becomes a process of discovery and description, of translation and communication (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972). According to Thomas (1993) it is important to remember that all ethnography is a dual translation process. The ethnographer translates the cultural codes of the informants into a symbolic form that she can understand. She then must take her symbols and translate

them into a text her intended audience can understand. Therefore the ethnographer must be fluent in three languages; that of her informant, of her own science, and of her audience.

As I turn to write the ethnographic text I am aware that my aim is to convey feeling as well as facts. If this ethnographic work illustrates rather than asserts, if it allows the reader to draw conclusions because the material speaks both to the issue and to them personally then I will be content that I have achieved my aim. Skillful ethnography conveys both the depth and breath of the ethnographer's experience in the field (Thomas, 1993).

**Figure No. 1: Taxonomic Outline of Reasons for Active Parenting***

Eric - Pilot

Analysis: Active Parenting (cover term)
Semantic relationship: Rationale
(X is a reason for doing Y)
Substitution Frame: X is a reason for active parenting

I. I love her

II. I have a duty/obligation
    A. Parenting is what you are supposed to do when you bring a child into the world

III. She is part of my life
    A. She is my flesh and blood
    B. I like what has happened to me in my life now that she is part of it
        1. I am more responsible
        2. I am more playful
            a. More expressive
            b. More 'in touch' with the child qualities within myself
        3. I am more caring

IV. I need the relationship
    A. I like watching her grow up
    B. I love her and I also really like her
    C. Through our relationship I have a sense of growing up, of what I missed
    D. I can kind of make peace with my own childhood now

V. My relationship with my own father was not good
    A. Having a parent that was aloof was hurtful
    B. I missed out on a lot of activities as a kid
    C. I never spent any time with my dad
    D. I saw my father as a bit of a brute

*Adapted from Spradley (1979)

**Figure No. 2: Taxonomic Outline of The Relationship with My Father ***

Alex - Informant #2

Analysis: Relationship with Father (cover term)
Semantic Relationship: Spatial
(X is a part of Y)
Substitution Frame: X is a part of the relationship with my father

I. The connection has been cyclical
   A. We once had a physical fight and we never talked about it
   B. My father has always been more antagonistic toward me than my mom
   C. He would sign letters he wrote to me - G.O.D. (good old dad)
   D. I was four and cut my leg badly. He laughed at me because I hadn't listened to him when he said it was dangerous
   E. My dad has the "right" way to do everything. This takes away from
      1. Personal learning
      2. Ownership
      3. Integrity
   F. My dad doesn't know how to 'cut slack'
   G. My dad was very supportive to me after my divorce
   H. I lived with my dad after my separation
II. Having my own child has brought the relationship with him into more focus
   A. The incident around ASA in the birthing room
   B. The incident around giving my daughter ice cream
   C. As I wrestle with how to father I look at how he was with me
III. My parents divorced when I was 17 and this affected many things
   A. My brother and sister really thrashed my dad
   B. I came to live with him and tried to act as a mediator
   C. I saw my dad as a man trying to define himself apart from his family
   D. He was accused of abandoning us. I saw he took a rigid position, he accepted our anger but he didn't come after us
   E. He still remembers me telling him - 'you need to make your marriage work'.
IV. I am coming to a peace with my father
   A. I am cutting through some crap ,learning to respect him for who he is
   B. I am trying not to attach value, blame, or anger
   C. I am trying to separate my stuff from what is his
   D. I try to think about who he is and what his path is
   E. The more I can really see him the more I can understand him
   F. I need to let go of the blame I hold, bring it to consciousness

*Adapted from Spradley (1979)

**Figure No. 3 - Taxonomic Outline of The Role of Father as Protector/Provider**

Sebastion - Informant #3

Analysis: Father as Protector/Provider (cover term)
Semantic relationship: Spatial
(X is a part of Y)
Substitution Frame: X is part of being protector/provider in a fathering role

I. After the separation we sold the assets
   A. I agreed to give my ex-wife over half of the money
   B. We paid off the loan on her car, which was virtually new
   C. I found my ex-wife a home to rent
      1. I paid all the rent on both houses
      2. I worked an extra job in the summer to cover both rents
      3. She told me the kids needed a home base. They each needed their own bedroom
      4. In the kids' eyes she made me responsible for their living situation

II. I like to feel that I am a caring, protective person
   A. Providing and protecting are my roles within this group of people
   B. I want to protect and help my children
   C. My ex-wife doesn't make as much money as I do so I feel it is incumbent upon me to provide more

III. I didn't like paying her rent but my mind couldn't figure out another way to do it

IV. I believe that younger children should be with their mothers
   A. Up to 13 years I think it is very important that kids are with their mom
   B. As a child I didn't get enough of my mom
   C. My thinking here may be part of a deep-seated cultural belief

*Adapted from Spradley (1979)

**Figure No. 4: Taxonomic Outline of Birth of My Son***

Philip- Informant #4

Analysis: Birth of My Son
Semantic relationship: Cause/Effect
(X is a result of Y)
Substitution Frame: X is a result of the birth of my son

I. I felt a connection to a more emotional side of myself
  A. Overwhelming feelings
    1. The birth was not part of my normal experience
    2. I experienced a flood of feelings, emotions, & thoughts
    3. My feeling was grounded in the belief it was "the right thing"
  B. I felt an immediate attachment to him
    1. All I could see was the baby
    2. My feeling was so quick & so deep
  C. Watching him be born was the most incredible experience
    1. I was taken by surprise at:
      a. The depth of my feelings
      b. The immediacy of my feelings
    2. I had no inkling of what becoming a parent would mean to me
    3. The birth happened right before my eyes
    4. My response was to his birth was both intellectual and emotional
II. I wanted to be protective
  A. The desire to protect was immediate upon seeing my son
  B. This desire to be protective later translated into a feeling of protectiveness toward all children
    1. I firmed up my commitment to my work
    2. There was a new creative part to my work
III. I had an almost immediate need to make life right for my son
  A. There was a strong sense of protecting my family as a unit
  B. Made a decision to remain home with my son during the first few months
IV. Sense of being vulnerable
  A. I have always been physically large.
  I experienced little fear for my own physical safety,
  until I was entrusted with this helpless, little being
  B. There was a sense of translating this vulnerability to all children

*Adapted from Spradley (1979)

**Figure Number 5: Paradigm Worksheet ***

Alex - Informant # 2

Worksheet for a Componential Analysis: Embracing Self as a Single Father

| | Dimensions of Contrast | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Contrast Set** | I am doing some thing special | I give her choices | Being a dad has made me more aware of my own dad | I care about her action | I care about her life skills | It is an opportunity to teach | How I role model is crucial | It hurts to see her in pain; a sense of powerlessness |
| It is a synthesis of all that I am | yes | no | yes | no | no | no | yes | yes |
| It creates a new fathering norm | yes | no | yes | no | no | yes | yes | no |
| It is a healing process | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| It is a way to honor myself | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no |
| The connection w/. my daughter transcends everything | yes | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | no |
| I am committed; both physically and emotionally protective | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| I take 50% responsibility for bringing a child into the world | no | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |

**Possible Themes**

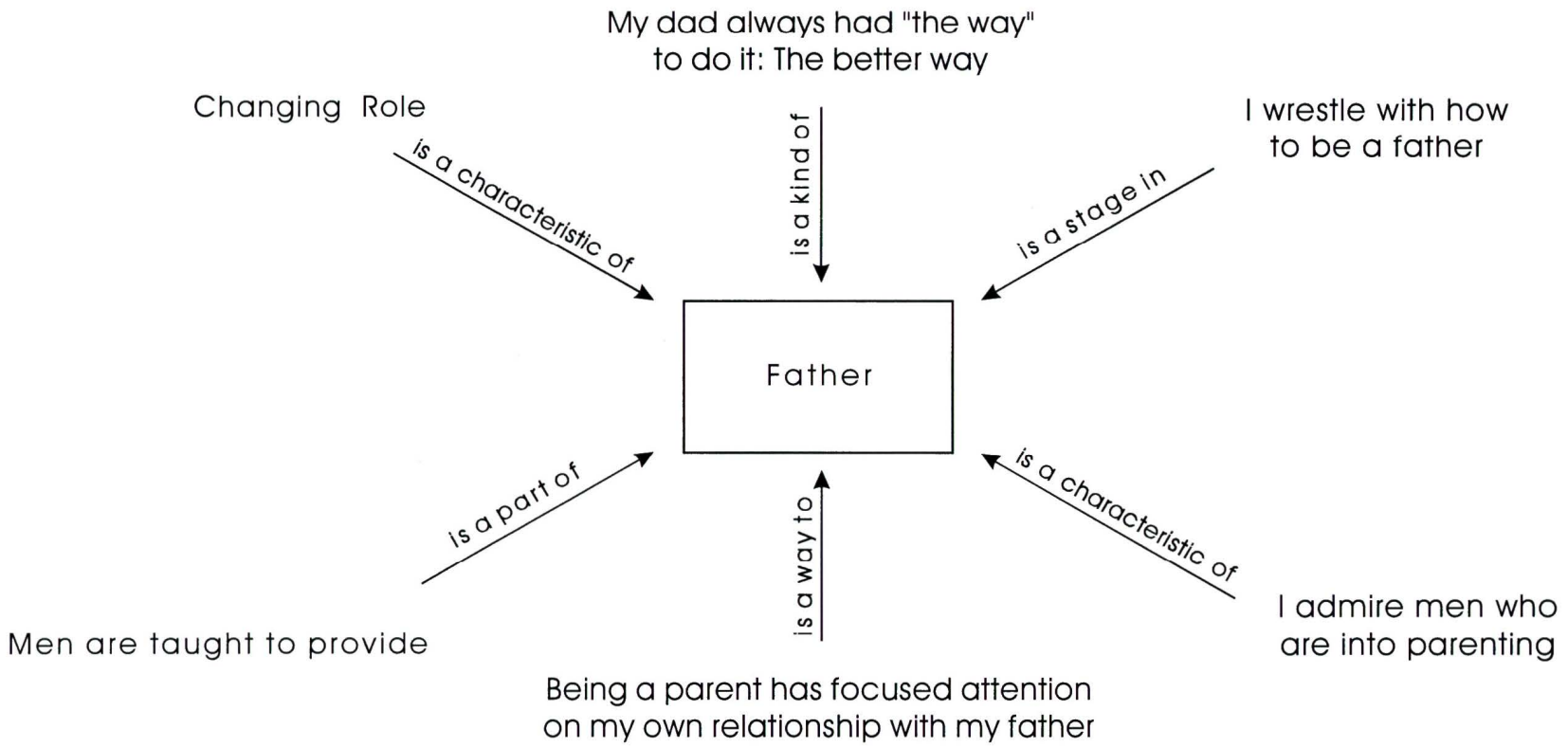
1. **Fathering is important**
2. **Fathering is part of my personal process**
3. **Fathering connects me to my past**
4. **Fathering connects me to my future**
5. **Experience powerlessness**
6. **How I am a parent has an effect**
7. **Parenting is reciprocal**
8. **Increasing my meaning of being an adult**

* Adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 6: Step in Componential Analysis*

## Some attributes and Semantic Relationships of Father

Alex - Informant #2

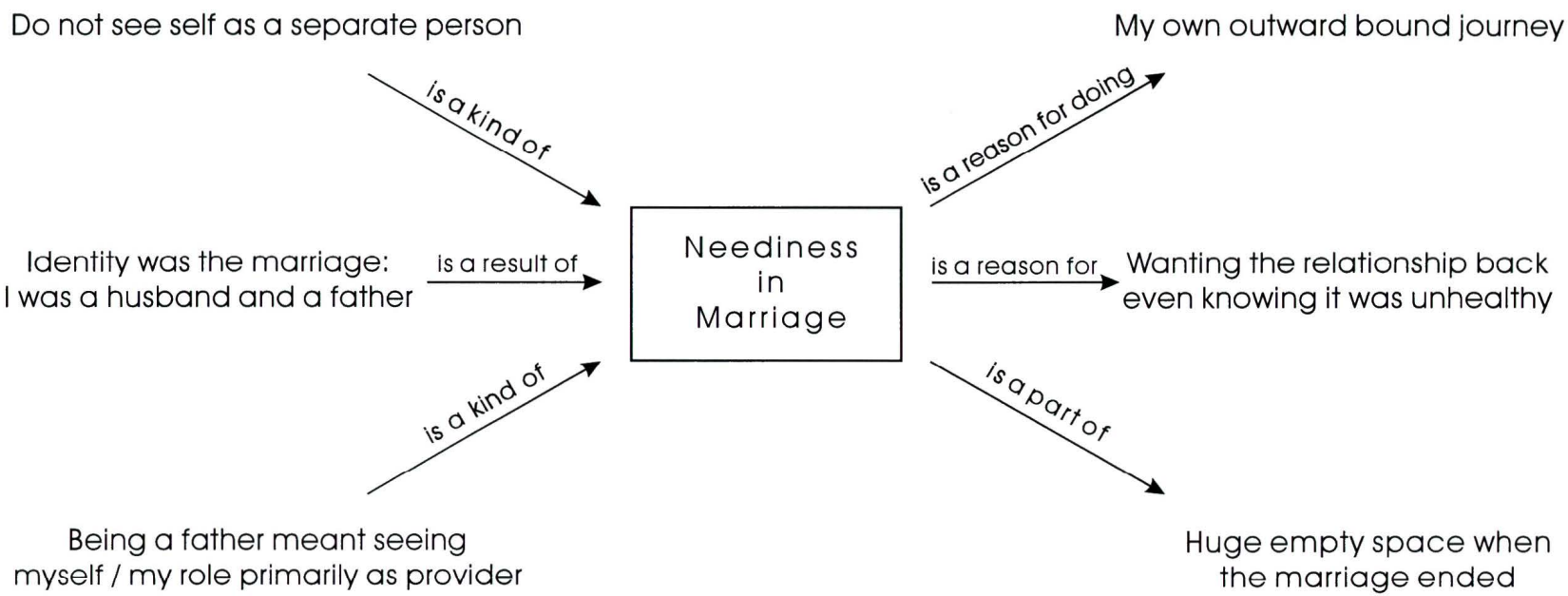



*adapted from Spradley (1979)

Figure No. 7: Step in Componential Analysis*

## Some attributes and Semantic Relationships of Neediness in Marriage

Eric - Pilot Informant




*adapted from Spradley (1979)

# CHAPTER FOUR

## The Ethnographic Text

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first offers the reader a narrative of each of the four informants; a description of the interview situation; an outline of the current arrangement with regards to parenting; and a synthesis of the informants' perspectives on parenting. The second part of the chapter offers a detailed description of each of the three themes uncovered after lengthy and careful thematic analysis. The themes will be presented in the following order:

(1) Connecting to a more emotional self.

(2) Opening to childhood experiences with emphasis on unresolved father issues.

(3) Perceiving male experience as primarily outer and female experience as both inner
and outer.

### Eric - Pilot Informant

#### Narrative of Informant

Eric, eldest of four children was raised in a small community where his father was employed as a laborer; his mother worked part-time after the children were grown. His parents have been married for over forty years and the family remains in close contact with each other. Following graduation from high school Eric worked in the logging industry until he entered university in 1977. He completed his BA 1981 and his Masters Degree in 1986. It was at University that he met his future wife. They lived together several years before getting married in 1982. A daughter was born in 1985 and after taking a year off to be at home with her Eric returned to work as a Life Skills Instructor at a Community

College. In 1991 he returned to University where he is currently completing his doctoral degree in Educational Psychology.

Current Arrangement with Regard to Parenting

Eric advised that during the divorce proceedings an agreement was reached for joint custody with the child's primary residence to be with the mother. Eric has custody of his daughter alternative weekends, every other Christmas and Easter holiday, as well as five weeks during the summer months. This arrangement has been strictly adhered to over the course of the seven years since the divorce. Any change that has occurred has been done so with considerable consultation and eventual agreement.

Interview Situation

Eric, an acquaintance of mine, responded positively when asked to be the pilot informant for the study. He was most willing to assist by offering information regarding his experience. We agreed to meet in my small office. Rapport was easily established during the interview in part because we had known each other previously and in part, because Eric has completed his Masters Degree and is acquainted with research interviewing. I found this situation helpful as I began my initial work with the ethnographic interview.

Following our initial meeting I transcribed the taped interview. Eric and I met some two weeks later, again in my office, for a second interview that lasted some two and a half hours.

Perspectives on the Fathering Experience

Eric advised that prior to the pregnancy he didn't really think about being a father and attached little meaning to the concept. "I didn't really even look at kids twice, they

seemed like a different sort of species. I didn't really pay much attention to kids before the pregnancy."

As the pregnancy progressed he found himself becoming more and more involved. His presence at the birth of his daughter was profound. He used phrases such as: "just blown away"; "emotionally overwhelmed"; "immediate bond" frequently when describing the event. Synthesizing his experience Eric stated that the birth of his daughter allowed him access to an emotional side of himself, that he began to view others and the world in an emotional rather than just a cognitive context. This opening to a sense of emotional connectedness is a consistent experience for all informants and will be discussed in some depth in the section on thematic analysis.

Eric's wife returned to work one month after their child's birth. Eric made a decision, supported by his wife, to remain at home during the first year of his daughter's life. The reasons Eric cited for his decision were the importance of parental care during an infant's first year and his desire to experience what it would be like "I really wanted to know what it meant, what it felt like, to be a parent full-time; what it felt like to take care of an infant." Eric stated he found this time with his daughter very rewarding. He advised that he very quickly established a routine with her and used words like "hoot" and "riot" to describe his experience. Eric stated that he was very happy, very satisfied, during this time of his life and was not particularly concerned with the larger culture's 'norm' of fathering. He advised that he spent the majority of time with his daughter and did not, in a daily sense, connect up with other parents who were in a full time child care/ house minding role. The absence of men talking to others about what it means to be a father is consistent in each of the informant's account.

Clearly the divorce was initiated by his wife. Eric indicated that during the break up he was in emotional turmoil; for a long time his focus was on getting back together. The idea of divorce was shocking, it shattered his dreams. Eric remembers saying during a therapy session, "You know I am going to be divorced; a divorced person and I will

never be the same." This sense of a dream shattering, of a lost ideal is a repeated theme that emerged throughout my interaction with all informants.

Ultimately the arrangement for the child's custody was initiated by the maternal grandfather who stated that both Eric and his wife needed to act in the best interest of their child. Eric agreed to joint custody with primary residence to be with the child's mother because he felt that "children need to be with their mom." He stated that he also had legal advice indicating that his wife, as the mother, would be granted custody. He was further advised that the year he had spent taking of care of his infant daughter, aged two and a half years at the time of divorce, would not be considered in the legal decision. Eric described his emotional state during this period:

> I felt powerless and I felt angry. I felt powerless all the time and I was always being told I was going to have to accept it. It was real hard, it was like a bitter pill that I had to swallow. I would get angry and sometime I would cry because it seemed so unfair...I felt powerless and guilty because I was letting my daughter down, she was going to be coming from a divorced family and I thought of families as essentially being a father and a mother and the kids.

Eric proceeded to discuss the evolution of his experience as a father. He described how he moved from the turmoil of a marriage gone bad, through divorce, to a time when he had his own living arrangement where he and his daughter were able to spend quiet constructive time together. Eric sees himself very much as a counter balance to his former wife. He feels that what he is able to offer his daughter is a blend of groundedness, evenness, and stability. He feels that he now has a more direct relationship with her as a result of being a single parent, that they are both able to be "who they are" with each other without interference. It is clear in discussion that Eric feels a strong obligation and duty to parent:

> I love my daughter and really feel that I had an obligation. And it was an obligation and duty which I had no problem with, to be there for her. You

> never walk away from that. It's not an obligation where you 'gotta do it', that's not what I mean. You have a kid and you have a kid and you are there. I love her and I am concerned with her well being and with my own. She became a part of my life. I know I could never go through life knowing that I have a child and not have any sort of relationship with her. I couldn't do that.

Parenting is a rewarding task for Eric and one that triggers many feelings, many memories of childhood experiences. He talked about the role models he experienced a child - the nurturing, the care, the sense of safety he received from women as opposed to the rather gruff, harsh exterior of male role models:

> I saw how my father was as a parent and I thought that it was not a good way to be with a child. And I remember the mothers in the neighborhood. You could always go to their house if something happened, and they would be watching out for you. So if you hurt yourself you could always go to a mother's house.

Eric talks of the connection he feels with his daughter, his love of her and his enjoyment at watching her grow. He is excited to be part of that process. He speaks of how his experience as a single parent has helped him learn to be more in touch with the emotional side of himself. He feels that this is possibly true for many men yet some men may be frightened by these feelings; To "feel feelings" could soften a protective covering and also trigger painful childhood issues. "It may be kind of frightening for some men."

In discussing what he understands as most important for him from his experience of being a single parent Eric cites:

- The emotional connection he now experiences within himself.
- His love of, and his ability to delight in his young daughter.
- A sense of self that is independent, competent, and clear.
- A fear of committed relationships with adult women.

- A greater felt sense of his own childhood experience.

- A growing awareness of the importance of himself as a father and as a role model.

## Alex - Informant # 2

### Narrative of Informant

Alex, the eldest of three children, spent his formative years in a small community where his father, a civil servant, was employed in middle management. Alex's parents divorced when he was 17; reportedly, this caused considerable disruption within the family. Since his parents' divorce Alex advised that his father re-married twice and currently lives with his third wife; his mother re-married once and has subsequently divorced her second husband. Still, there remains a strong sense of family.

Alex left home at age 17 to attend an alternate school in the Yukon. He then remained in the north to work in construction. He returned to his hometown at age 24 and within months married his high school sweetheart. A daughter was born shortly after the marriage. The couple separated some three years later. Following his divorce Alex returned to University and completed a degree in education. He currently teaches at an alternate school in his hometown.

### Current Arrangement with Regard to Parenting

Alex advised that prior to their divorce he and his former partner were able to work out a custody arrangement through mediation with a Family Court Counsellor. They arrived at a custody arrangement that divided both the time spent and the financial responsibility for their daughter equally. The way in which time has been divided has altered over the years to suit differing needs but there has been no difficulty either in reaching an agreement or in maintaining it. Alex feels that his former wife was extremely

guilty for leaving the marriage and this, in part, contributed to an amiable custody agreement. During the second interview Alex advised that his daughter had come to live with him full-time as the child's mother was experiencing problems in her second marriage. It appears, at least at the present time, this couple has been able to co-parent in a co-operative, healthy manner.

Interview Situation

During the initial meeting I met with Alex at his home. He occupies the lower half of his mother's house, which, in fact, had been the family home prior to his father's leaving in 1974. It is a comfortable residence located on a large piece of waterfront property in a semi-rural area on Cowichan Bay. Our first meeting lasted two hours. Following this I transcribed the taped interview and analyzed it according to Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence. We then met for a second interview, this time we talked on the deck overlooking the ocean. Our second meeting lasted some three hours.

Perspectives on the Fathering Experience

Alex advised that he has always loved children, had always assumed he would have children of his own, and that "carrying on his family name" held importance for him. He stated he was aware of conception the moment "we" got pregnant and from the onset of the pregnancy he felt a marked change. Alex stated the entire experience from conception to birth was, on many levels, mystical for him. Witnessing the birth of his daughter was a profound, moving experience:

> I knew that I had a real clear connection with my daughter since birth. That connection transcended a lot of intellectual stuff. The interaction of men and women together - there are some spiritual moments that do connect us together - one of these was the emergence of our child - her conception. So I think that moment of conception also connects me

> directly with her and I think that moment is not of this earth, not of the intellect.

Alex's wife returned to work following her maternity leave. By choice Alex, self employed as a carpenter at the time, acted as primary caregiver during his daughter's first year. It is important to Alex that he be able to define his life as much as he is able. He stated that part of his fear around becoming a parent centered on getting trapped by a routine, a fear that he will loose the spontaneous aspect of self that he consciously fosters. While admitting that the birth of his daughter did irrevocably alter life as he had known it, it appears Alex adjusted to this change in a manner agreeable to his sense of self:

> One of my big struggles in life has been not to have a routine....after she was born it was really important to me that our life didn't change. I remember seeing this comedienne depict new parents treating their baby like an anchor - 'we can't do anything because we have a baby.' I didn't want that to happen so we would follow the routine that emerged. Nothing was set.

The divorce, initiated by Alex's wife leaving him for another man, was a very difficult time. Alex stated that he had always held marriage up as the ideal, that he didn't want to lose his family, and that for many months following the separation he did everything he could think of to hold his family together. Ultimately Alex feels that it was his ex-wife's guilt around leaving that permitted the equitable custody arrangement to be easily reached. Alex also stated that his strong parental influence during the first year has always been recognized.

Since divorce the arrangement for parenting has been equally shared. Clearly Alex is committed to the well-being of his young daughter and appears to have a close and conscious relationship with her. The quality of his parenting is of primary importance to him. This man wrestles with how to be the best father he can, how to help his child grow into a mature, responsible woman in a world that rapidly changes. While Alex acknowledges difficulty in letting go of a romantic ideal that marriage is forever he is content with making his life situation work. He perceives all experience as opportunity,

and is intent to create a relationship with his daughter that is meaningful in the moment. Alex expects to learn from everything.

It is clear that being a father has placed a new emphasis upon his relationship to his own father. He talked openly and often of the relational difficulties there. Reference to the kind of fathering they have received is a recurrent theme amongst the informants and will be discussed further in the thematic analysis. Alex verbalizes a commitment to his role as father not merely for personal reasons but also for the sake of a new order of men's parenting.

In discussing what in his experience of fathering following divorce has been most important for him Alex cites:

- Using his role as father as part of his healing process.

- Seeing his situation as an opportunity to learn how to father differently.

- Dealing with childhood myths, i.e. Ken & Barbie; the belief marriage is forever.

- Learning to be "real', to be honest with what he feels and how his emotions are effecting him in the moment.

- Understanding his effect upon another human life as teacher and as role model.

- The sense of powerlessness he felt as his marriage and the myth of happily ever after dissolved.

- Coming to terms with his relationship to his own father.

## Sebastion - Informant #3

### Narrative of Informant

Sebastion, age 51, is the youngest of three children born to educated, upper-middle class parents. His father was a Professor of Political Science at the National Institute in Philadelphia and authored several books; his mother worked for the United Nations. The family was socially conscious and active in the Quaker Community.

Sebastion married his college sweet heart in 1969 just after graduating with a B.A. from a small college in Vermont. Soon after this Sebastion began to pursue his dream of homesteading. Within six years the couple moved to British Columbia where, for over the next fifteen years, they homesteaded in a remote, isolated area in the northern section of the province. They had three children and it was a need to involve their children in a more active community that prompted the couple to move to one of the Gulf Islands. Here they purchased thirty acres of land and maintained a lifestyle as much in tune with the natural world as possible.

Sebastion advised his marriage had been in serious difficulty for several years prior to August, 1991 when the couple finally separated. They sold their land and both moved to the city where they rented separate houses and their children enrolled in local schools. Sebastion is presently working as Vice-President of sales for a bio-degradable soap company he started in 1990. Currently this work requires that he divide his time between home, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Current Arrangement with Regard to Parenting

Sebastion advised that when he and his wife separated the children were all old enough to choose where they wished to live. The two girls lived with Sebastion and the youngest child, a boy, chose to live with his mother. This arrangement lasted a year. Then his oldest daughter moved in with her boyfriend and Sebastion enrolled his youngest daughter in a Quaker Boarding School in Northern California. Finding himself alone and paying rent on two houses in the city Sebastion returned to the Gulf Islands where he was able to 'house sit' and reduce his financial expenditures. Then, as Sebastion phrased it, " Circumstances conspired against me and I lost my kids." His eldest daughter returned home after leaving her boyfriend; the younger daughter left the boarding school. The only 'family' home was his former wife's. Sebastion advised that, under some pressure to create a stable home for his children, he found his former wife a bigger house and continued to

pay all her rent. His newly created business took off in California and Sebastion found himself traveling more and more.

Currently his oldest two children are away from home. His son, now 14, lives with his mother in a quiet, residential area of the city. Sebastion recently rented a home in this area to facilitate visits with his son, "he's at an age where he likes to be around his friends." Sebastion visits with his son on a regular basis when in town. Indeed, his son is the primary reason Sebastion travels back to British Columbia two weeks out of every month. It appears the visiting arrangements are casual. The two daughters, both away at school, have regular contact with both parents. However, as his former wife maintains the larger house and lives in the city full-time the children consider her residence 'home.' Sebastion continued to pay the entire rent on this house until very recently. He advised he now pays half the rent and has agreed to do so until his youngest child completes high school.

There has been no formalized custody agreement. At the time of the interview the couple had been separated for nearly four years.

Interview Situation

The initial interview occurred at Sebastion's home and lasted approximately three hours. He relayed 'his story' talking at length about his background, his relationship with his former wife, and his parenting experience both during the marriage and following the separation. I transcribed the interview and analyzed it according to Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence. I then met with Sebastion for a second time at his office. This interview last some two and a half hours.

Perspectives on the Fathering Experience

Sebastion stated that he always knew he would be a father, that he has always had an inherent sense of himself as a father. He recalled an incident from

seventh grade when he stopped and helped out some younger children. The young girl's comment has remained with remained with Sebastion for almost forty years:

> I remember back in seventh grade there was this girl and there were these kids having trouble with something. I stopped and helped out and she said to me, 'You will be a very lovely father.' I remember that. I didn't have the experience of having younger children around because I was the youngest.

Three weeks after his first daughter was born Sebastion's wife returned to work and he became the primary caregiver. He stated his wife extracted milk and froze it. Sebastion would then feed this to his infant daughter throughout the day:

> Taking care of her, nursing her, being there every day created an incredible bond. I was just totally taken by her. She would ride around in my snuggle and when the refrigerator door opened her arms would just go up. I got very turned into her. I loved it. That first relationship was really special to me. I loved the closeness. I loved being the mother. I was in bliss as a parent.
>
> For our second daughter her mother remained at home and nursed her. So it was a very different experience for me. I am so thankful for the connection I had with my first child.

In describing the parenting experience during his marriage Sebastion stated that the most important thing for him was that he could share his life with his children, that the homesteading experience promoted closeness and a special kind of bonding . Sebastion further described how he loved his kids' energy and the opportunity to be fully present in their activity. He indicated that the shadow side of his experience had not so much to do with actual fathering as much as being in relationship with someone who really "doesn't like you".

> The hard part is not about being a father or even about the responsibility. It is about being in a parenting relationship with a spouse who doesn't like you. It's a real drag. You get picked on all the time. Nothing I could do was right and that included any aspect of parenting.
>
> It seemed that she was totally permissive with our son and then I started taking the opposite stance. So this kind of thing made parenting very hard, when parents are not seen to be together. So that was what was hurtful

> about parenting - our agreement as parents was not congruent. It short-circuited every thing we tried to do.

In describing the fathering experience after divorce Sebastion felt he "flourished as a parent." Sebastion, similar to other men in this study, spoke of his loneliness following divorce, of his vicarious search for a new mate. He spoke of the internal shifts brought about by separation. His sense of loss and paradoxically his sense of finding a new self - a sense of self that is confident in the ability to create and sustain intimate relationships with his children. In speaking to what it most important to him about being a father Sebastion stated:

> I believe it is important to be in relationship. Life is more interesting that way. When you have children you are constantly in relationship. You learn from your children, grow with them, and hopefully they learn from you. I love the flux and surge and connection that comes with being a father, being a parent. Trying to hear another person intimately is hard work but it is rewarding. Really it is all there is.

## Philip - Informant #4

### Narrative of Informant

Philip, age 48, was born and raised in a small township in the south of England. His father was a physician; the family was financially secure. Philip is the eldest child and has two younger sisters. He describes his childhood as a secure time with conservative parents who created a stable environment.

Philip left home at age 18 and spent many years traveling and developing his profession - journalism. At age 30 he married a woman he met while living and working in Montreal. Within two years his son was born; two years later the couple had a daughter. Philip stated that during this time he was ambitious, eager to make a solid career for himself in the writing/broadcasting industry. His focus was on establishing himself professionally and his frequent absences from the home left their mark. In 1990 the

couple separated. Philip is currently a freelance writer and is able to make a comfortable living doing what he loves.

Current Arrangement with Regard to Parenting

Although the marital separation was initiated by Philip it was a very painful time for him. He stated that during the early years of the separation there was much bitterness and quarreling. Soon after the separation his wife left Toronto, where they had been living, and moved out to the west coast with both children. This was an unexpected turn of events for Philip and for the next several years he was forced to carry on a long distance relationship with his children. He visited them on the coast when possible and brought them out to Toronto during the summer months. He found this time emotionally difficult as well as financially costly. During the fall of 1992 Philip was able to move to the west coast; he purchased a house within blocks of his children's residence. Visits with his kids became frequent; he curtailed his work schedule to fit this new parenting arrangement. Over a relatively short time Philip's former wife became involved with another man. The children preferred to be with their father and soon both requested to live with him. Because of the children's' age, then 13 and 11, it was finally agreed they could choose their place of residence. The children now live with Philip full-time. Philip had not anticipated the situation would evolve as it has but clearly is content with the arrangements.

Interview Situation

Both interviews occurred at Philip's home, a well maintained three bedroom residence in a quiet, upper middle class residential district. The initial interview last two hours. I then transcribed the taped interview and analyzed the contents according to Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence. The second interview, lasting over two hours, was also taped, transcribed and analyzed according to Spradley's method.

Perspective on the Fathering Experience

Philip advised that he has always felt an affinity with children; had always assumed he would become a father. Yet even with this self knowledge he stated he could not possibly have really understood what meaning becoming a father would hold for him:

> I just had no idea that having a child would be like it was, that I would ever feel so deeply. This new little being was just a delight, he totally captivated me. I remember feeling very protective toward him, very responsible, I wanted my son to have a 'good' life. The experience changed me. I was very, very happy.

Philip advised that the month following his son's birth he stayed home in order to help his wife and to be with their new son. However, work pressure persisted. Philip stated he was ambitious, and quickly found himself re-involved in a frantic work schedule. He feels that during his children's early years he could easily have been depicted as typically male in that when they were younger he was not active in their daily care. He attributes this to a desire to succeed professionally, to provide for his family, and because he believed he was doing what fathers do:

> I don't know how that distance happened. I do recall how much I was taken by our first child - there were very strong feelings of attachment. Then work pressure seem to build. It is a cut throat business and I was ambitious. I guess I also thought that mothers take care of small infants, I assumed that my involvement would come later. I was satisfied with what my wife did. Although all this went on it wasn't really conscious, or I didn't make it conscious. It is how things seems to work out.

Philip advised that when he and his wife finally agreed to separate he assumed he would be the one to move out:

> It was the male role, the men all moved out. It is a male thing not to cause hardship on a women. I assumed that taking care of her was synonymous with taking care of the children. I didn't separate them at that time. That is the way I thought. I didn't think about myself or what I felt. I did what I thought I was suppose to do. I did what I thought was 'right' without any thought to what 'right' really meant.

Philip stated that following his separation and the loss of his children he fell apart emotionally:

> I attempted to throw myself into my work but something happened to my creative aspect, something that I could not ignore. It was like part of me was gone. It took time to regain a sense of purpose. It was work to begin to form a new kind of relationship with myself and with what I felt. There were many feelings that I had never allowed myself to feel and it was this that initially drove me to see a counsellor. I had no support really. I felt that every thing that was important had been taken away from me, even though I was the one who initiated the separation. This was all very difficult to admit. At first I felt foolish, weak. Slowly I began to get in touch with the emotional part of myself that I had first experienced when my son was born; the self that seemed to come out so readily in my work, but not in my life.

Philip is pleased with how the parenting arrangement has evolved. He is comfortable in his role as a single father. Clearly he is involved in the daily activities that surround his children. He is committed to being there for them and attends as many sporting and school events as he is able, which he advises is quite a number:

> I am an involved parent because I understand how important it is. And also I suppose because it is something I didn't have as a child. My dad was a Doctor and usually too busy to watch my soccer matches. I remember what that felt like and I didn't want to do that to my kids.

The explication of what was hurtful as a child and learning how not to parent from such experiences arose many times in conversation with the men of this study. It will be discussed in some depth in the thematic analysis.

In speaking with Philip about what is most important to me about his fathering experience following divorce he said:

> Clearly it is the deep connection that I feel, that I have been able to acknowledge, with both of my children. My kids are really important to me. They are the most important people in my life, the people I have the strongest relationship with are my kids, more than with anyone else I have ever been with.

## Themes

A theme is a major dimension or major aspect of the study; it is a partial descriptor of the phenomenon (Tesch, 1990). Themes are elusive, they are not objects encountered at certain points in the text nor is their discovery dependent solely upon technique (Van Manen, 1987). Interpreting themes requires that the ethnographer search for images, metaphors and symbols used by the informants; interpreting themes invokes the imagination. Thematic analysis requires that the ethnographer create a connectedness between the worlds of her informants. In this study I have attempted to bring together separate strands of experience from each informant in order to create a pattern of their cultural understanding (Banister, 1991).

Writing a thesis is a large project and like most candidates I worked alone and, like most candidates, experienced many feelings, reactions, frustrations as my work progressed. There was anxiety over the writing; drudgery in transcribing the lengthy interviews, continual doubt as to the relevance of what I was doing. Self discipline and satisfaction were also elements involved. Reflecting upon the process I found the data analysis to be the most difficult, the most confusing. I found myself staring at the transcribed interviews, uncertain and overwhelmed. And still, I was fascinated by the words, pulled forward by a sense of underlying meaning, intrigued by the connection between four very separate narratives. Slowly there was movement, then progression, and finally an arrival. I learned that analysis is neither a stagnant nor a sequential process; indeed it more closely resembles a spiraling motion. And in this sense, the conclusions I have arrived at are not final but partial, subject always to re-thinking. Denzin (1989) notes that how a text is interpreted is dependent, in large measure, upon the readers' experience with the phenomenon under study. If I have been able to successfully describe the kind of cultural meanings these men have learned in order to make sense of their world then this

work will broaden and increase the readers perspectives. If done well, intellectual reflections always create new ways of thinking (Cottle, 1977).

## Theme #1
## Connecting to a more emotional self

> I don't think that I have ever put this into words before. When we were married we kind of had roles around the kids, nothing defined, just the way we were. I suppose, looking at it, we kind of just followed what we were brought up with - not all of it of course, but the essential structure was there. I just assumed she (former partner) knew about taking care of the kids, you know the daily stuff. I mean I was there and I helped out. I played with the kids when I was home. But I took a back seat to the emotional stuff. I believed she was better equipped to handle that. It's how it was; I didn't think for a moment that it should be any other way. Then following the separation, after the conflict and turmoil kind of died down, when I had the kids I started to see that I could do everything. It felt somehow like less of a role. Like when my daughter's cat was hit by a car and she was so upset well I talked with her, and we buried the cat and had a funeral. We did this together and I remember how close I felt to her to be able to share that, to be able to really help her with it. It hurt me to see her in so much pain but it helped me to know that I could help her. That never would have happened when I was married; her mom would have handled the tears, I would have dug the grave for the cat and felt badly and then brushed it aside. (Philip)

In modern North American culture there is an unbroken image of the male parent as protector and provider. The father spends most of his time away from the family, earning money. He is involved with the larger, more objective issues of the world rather than the smaller, subjective concerns of the home (Coleman & Coleman, 1988). Although a prevailing view holds that it is erroneous to think of women primarily as wives and mothers there seems little difficulty in thinking of men as workers first and fathers second.

Numerous authors have hypothesized a commonalty in men's thought and values and labeled it 'the masculine mystique' (Pichitino, 1983; Osherson, 1986; O'Neil, 1982; 1990; Farrell, 1993). The masculine mystique implies that men are superior to women; masculinity superior to femininity; power and control superior to feelings and vulnerability. In our culture parenting is often synonymous with the feminine in that parenting implies nurturing, an activity seen as natural to women yet not to men. Men tend to avoid emotions and intimacy because they are perceived as essentially feminine and therefore a potential threat to their masculine self (Leafgren, 1990). According to O'Neil (1982) the masks men have developed often result from a fear of being perceived as vulnerable and weak, a fear of being considered feminine.

By necessity divorced men often fulfill both the role of father and of mother. Their responsibility expands to include not only providing and protecting but also more nurturing tasks that are generally connected with the "feminine role". As fathers deal with emotional concerns they experience a direct feeling connection with their child and a shift in attitude often takes place (Kaufman, 1993). Honouring the connectedness that arises in the emotional relationship with their child occurs when men can view themselves in a more holistic light and feel personal power as an inner strength rather than as power over. In attempting to define the sense of self experienced as they began a parenting role following marital separation all informants described an aspect of self that they had sensed but had not experienced in relationship with their child when married. Eric spoke of his fear when his marriage was ending:

> I think the primary reason I wanted to get back with her was that I wanted us to be a family. I was also afraid of being alone. My identity was in being part of that relationship, being a husband and a father. I didn't see myself as separate at all. So when the relationship ended I felt I couldn't handle it. I thought I would lose my daughter."

Eric then spoke of a new kind of relationship with his daughter following divorce and a new, emergent sense of self:

> Most of the conflicts that occurred when I was married were between my former wife and daughter. They fought all the time. After the divorce that just totally went away. I never have to tell my daughter to do or not to do something, usually she just does it. If she really doesn't want to we will talk about it a little bit and decide on it and that's OK. She doesn't whine or manipulate, yet with her mom she was doing that all the time and it just drove me up the wall. It is a lot calmer now. I feel that I am able to be more who I am with her..... people who see us together say that she is happy when she is with me and that she will always remember this. So I think that our relationship, what we have together, what we are together, is going to be more important for her in the long run, and for me also, not the fact that I am not there every day.

When I asked Eric what he found to be the most important thing he has uncovered out about himself since divorcing and assuming a single parenting role he replied:

> I have had, going on for almost seven years, this situation with my daughter. There are times when it really hurts but we've done well over these last seven years. I know things about myself, that I am a good father, that I am there for her. Through all this I think I have gotten rid of my neediness, that part of me I have never really liked. I think that is gone. I have a better sense of my own individual self."

Sebastion, like Eric, found that his relationship with his children was closer since his separation. He credits some of this feeling of closeness to the absence of conflicted relationships:

> Before separating our family was like (the play) Virginia Woolf. It was bizarre, it was absolutely crazy. There would be horrific fights, with screaming and yelling and pounding on doors. As soon as I was out of the household my daughters came to live with me and it was fun. We didn't have a single major fight, we may have disagreed about what TV show we would watch but we had really good talks. I really liked it. I am a good parent. It is hard for me to even say this because it sounds stuck up or something but I am a good parent and outside of my former wife's shadow I flourished. We all did, we had fun.

In various studies (Ehrensaft, 1990; Leafgren, 1990) many fathers have indicated the relationship with their children became closer following separation. Philip's experience of parenting following separation supports studies indicating a closer, less strained relationship with his children:

> Parenting in a real, actual, sense got better when we separated. That is what I finally noticed. I didn't have to explain myself to anyone, have anyone second guess me, or worry about anyone under cutting me. So all that was better. And I started to see that I could have a real, a positive relationship with both my kids. It was my opportunity for us to "see" each other; for them to see who I am, what I do, what I want to do and for me to see them, their struggle, where they are wanting to go in their lives.

Indeed, research indicates fathers are equally competent parents; that the relationship between single fathers and their children often becomes closer, and in some cases more meaningful following marital separation (Robinson & Barret, 1986; Weitzman, 1988).

It seems that as conflict was removed Sebastion also experienced a more complete sense of self in relationship to his children:

> The separation helped me to see, to understand that outside of these dysfunctional dynamics I really was a good parent. I hardly had conflict with my kids. I was good at diffusing conflict, at finding options. What I am discovering is that I am getting more to the point where everyone is right and everyone is wrong. When I parented as part of a couple she would think she was right, and I would think she was wrong. It is hard to resolve when that kind of dynamic starts to happen.

Essential to the definition of an emotional self is acknowledgment of feeling on the masculine side. Various statements and examples would indicate that all four informants struggled with the lack of emotional boundaries when emeshed in a conflicted marital relationship. Sebastion talked of a different emotional sense of himself, his limits, and a new found ability to understand and set personal boundaries:

> One of the things I have become aware of is how little I've stood up for myself. I am not going to do that anymore. If someone around is hurting

> me - they and I, because there is always the two, if we can't stop it then we need not be with each other.

Following separation with a marked decrease in conflict and more direct connection with their children, these men all acknowledged their capability as fathers. Moreover, they came to understand themselves as compassionate and sensitive human beings. Alex talked about the importance of establishing a healthy relationship with his young daughter. When pressed to describe what healthy looked like to him he responded:

> Healthy is independence, communication, realness, openness; removal of toxicity, removal of the things that cloud. So healthy is, for me, when I am hurting or when I am whatever it is important for me to say to my daughter this is what is happening for me. To be real so that I am not masking anything. Healthy is not burdening, it is not dumping stuff on her, not using her as a crutch or whatever. Healthy is about being real and recognizing my own stuff. It is about me recognizing my own filters and requesting/expecting the same. I really believe that parenting her the way I have since separation has been about coming to terms with a healthy relationship both within myself and also outside myself.

Alex was also able to transfer his vision of what he saw for himself in this newly created role to males in general:

> One of the things I noticed since the last time I talked with you is my relationship to other men. I started to look at maleness. I started to seek males out. I have made an effort to hang out with more men, to attend meetings, to pay attention to what men are saying and it has been neat. What I have come to see is that men who I really value and recognize are men who strive and struggle and laugh a lot. They are strong men and they have their own paths. They are parents, they are creative about who they are as men and who they are as parents. And for them this means not being real sure but being real clear. They are men who can stand on their own.

In turn, all informants described themselves as emotional, connected fathers. Despite societal norms that encourage males to keep emotions, with the exception of anger and aggression, from showing, the men of this study openly communicated their feelings, goals, values as well as a sense of vulnerability. Philip describes his transition

from the role of father and husband to a new way of fathering with a sense of felt authenticity:

> Part of the sense of powerlessness I felt was that I had lost my wife, my partner. I lost my kids, my home, a lifestyle and a relationship. Mostly, I lost a function and my identity. For a long time I felt all that I had was a big hole, so part of my learning was how to fill that hole. That was part of what I needed to learn. Then I started to see that not only would I survive but I would be all right. I learned that I was still having a relationship with my kids and it was a relationship defined by me and by them. It was ours. And I saw, really for the first time I think, how very precious it was to me. And I saw that my kids wanted it as much as I did.

Eric openly discusses his feelings around interaction with his young nephew as one defined by constricted emotionality. He described the relationship as exemplifying to him how difficult it is, as a male, to break from a deeply ingrained belief system about displaying affection to children:

> It's awkward. Women they cry, hug and that sort of thing but men, we didn't see it or experience it, so it is hard for us. I experienced my young nephew in this way. When he was really little I would always give him a kiss. But now that he is older (two years) I am starting to feel that uncomfortableness. I love him, he is a neat little boy but there is something that is just there. So I start to turn my cheek -"kiss me on the cheek".

Sebastion displays considerable vulnerability and feeling as he describes the lack of relationship with his former wife: "I would really like to be good friends with her but I don't know how to get past the garbage. If we could be friends and leave all the garbage behind us.... we lived so isolated for so many years that we were the whole world to each other...."

When speaking of witnessing his daughter's psychic pain Alex articulates his own feeling:

> It is when I see her in pain that my heart aches. It tugs at my heart. That is the hardest, just seeing her. The pain of seeing her and knowing that there

> is nothing I can do about it. It is so hurtful. It is like this thing coming out of my heart, straight up. It is a very consuming thing, it is a powerlessness.

All the informants, men who have remained actively involved with their children since marital separation, talked of their experience openly and in ways that are indicative of self-worth and healthy self esteem. They spoke of learning to become aware of their emotions in a way not previously experienced; awareness of emotions is one of the crucial components of self exploration. All informants spoke of a new sense of self, a full and emotional connection with their children. They all know themselves as competent, loving fathers. With a growing sense of compassion men learn sensitivity to the pain and suffering in their world (May, 1990). Ideally, this sensitivity finds its ways into action that supports human values and connectedness. Philip demonstrates such commitment when he speaks to what he perceives as "emotional blockage" in his son and what he believes he may be able to offer in this regard:

> The whole marriage breakdown caused me to look, really look at myself. I have an understanding now of my own process and I see that this can help my children. I hope to spare them some of the pain I have experienced in my life because I didn't know very much about it or how to process it. My daughter is doing all right but my son is more emotionally held in, there is not much I can do but just watch and hope to access that part of him whenever and however I am able.

Although the men of this study spoke of experiencing a more inclusive, a more emotional sense of self there was also a clear division between what is considered male and what is considered female. This type of framework creates polarity. Examples of such thinking are: self/ other; rationale/ intuitive; intellectual/ emotional. These dualities are essentially opposite, theoretically opposed to one another. They are also hierarchical, as one side has historically been considered to be more valid than the other. This belief in duality is a way of thinking that seemingly, albeit subtly, dominates the thought process of each informant studied.

Based on her research, Gilligan (1982) states male development emphasizes separateness and independence whereas female development emphasizes attachment and connection. Gilligan stresses that each gender is capable of developing the other perspective.

Many men tend to deny their masculinity in the search to become the "new male" (May, 1990). Indeed, informants of the study view little in the traditional fathering role that is nurturing. "In the past the father's role has been to provide, 'father knows best' - that sort of stuff. It is like taking care of the show but it is not in the heart. It is not crying; it is not sitting up all night with a sick child; and it is not talking about fears and doubts" (Sebastion). The implication here is that perceiving oneself as emotional is on the feminine side. While such thinking can create shifts in outer action it does little to address the deep seated belief in duality that dominates the gender question. If we can learn to internalize a man who is both nurturant and competent and a woman who is both nurturant and competent, gender does not become a limiting stereotypic aspect of identity. As noted by Alex:

> The inner marriage. So maybe that is what I see. A union of all this stuff within me. Maybe that is what it is. I know that if I deny union I will deny something vital within me. That is not what I want. My focus, my goal, my dream is to be centered on self - not doing on the outside, but doing on the inside.

Ultimately only when one's sense of self becomes whole and integrated can one begin to transform relationships and social existence.

I have examined how each informant described experiencing a more complete sense of an emotional self following marital separation and assuming the parenting responsibilities of a single person. This inclusive sense of self is characterized by learning to set some emotional boundaries; by understanding reciprocity and intimacy in relationship with their children; and by acknowledging an emotional connectedness not

previously experienced. Learning to care for children as single men offered informants a sense of purpose and a seemingly unwavering belief in their competency as fathers.

## Theme #2

### Opening to childhood experiences with emphasis on unresolved father issues

The men of this study were acutely aware of the mirroring presence of their fathers behind them. As they struggled to construct an image of themselves as a father to their child/ren, the relationship with their own father, which was typically defined as "troubled", played a key role. It is difficult to know if their status as single fathers emphasized the residual presence of their own fathers in the fathering role or if the reflection back is common to all men who parent. However, it is clear that the men of this study consciously attempted to compensate for the perceived deficiencies in their fathers' parenting.

Informants often spoke of the fathering experience in context of their own childhood. Memories were primarily relayed through story telling. The informants' reflections on the fathering they received often illustrated an underlying hypothesis that equated the denial of pain and fear with masculinity:

> I remember my dad working on something with another man and telling me to stay away when they went down for lunch. I remember going, "Don't be such a wiener, I can take care of myself." I said that. Well maybe I thought that to myself. I can't remember. It is a blank. I remember seeing the tab sticking out and stepping on it. Then I remember sitting on the stairs and I remember falling down but I don't remember sticking my feet out or getting up. They say there is significance to things you remember and things you don't. Then I can remember his laughing, pointing at my leg. I don't remember the moment when I was traumatized. He probably helped me out and stood there until I calmed down. Then he looked at the leg and laughed at me and said, "You stupid ninny!" (Alex)

> I remember....my dad thought that the way to teach me to swim was to take me out and throw me into the water. He did that and then he walked away. I was floundering in the water and they all started to laugh - he was with a couple of his friends. So when I started to take swimming lessons at the pool I was terrified. I was totally terrified of the water being over my head. Panic attacks. The instructor was a man and he would get mad at me because I panicked all the time and then I would reach out to grab him. (Eric)

Although research often cites the emotional unavailability of fathers, a son's need for his father's attention, nurturance, and approval does not cease because these needs have not been met (May, 1990). Various authors (Osherson, 1986; Balswick, 1988; May, 1990; Allen, 1993) refer to this condition as "father hunger." Clearly there is a special importance of fathers to sons, both in childhood and later as adults. Boys search deeply throughout childhood, beginning around age three, for a masculine model on which to build a sense of self (May, 1990). The experience depicted by the informants concurs with the prevailing belief that boys rarely experience their fathers as sources of warm soft nurturance (Miedzian, 1992). The stories told to me were of fathers who were sometime rejecting, sometime absent:

> It is confused and I don't really remember the detail all that well. But I remember how I felt. My dad was a Doctor. He was quite busy and important in our community. I remember people would say good things about him. But I missed him, he was away a lot of the time.
> I played soccer in school and I got quite good at it. It was important to me. I remember wanting him to come to my games so badly. I knew he was busy and I would try to excuse him but still I would search the sidelines for him. One time there was an important match, a school from out of the district was coming. They were a good team. I remember he said he would come and he did. And I played my worst game ever. I knew that he was disappointed with me and I felt that I had really let him down. We never talked about it. I don't think he came to another game. And I told myself it didn't matter."
> (Philip)

> I remember once we were in this screaming match and he had these blood vessels starting to come to the top of his nose. I remember smiling within myself thinking, 'I wonder if I can make them burst.' His eyes were really bulging at the moment, his glasses were almost steaming. I was backed up against the wall with his fist around my throat. We never talked about it afterward. It was just left alone. (Alex)

Repeatedly during the interviews I was struck by the fact that the stories informants relayed of their fathers centered on missed connections. If the traditional depiction of men in families is accurate then the father's role in the child's memory should center primarily around the provider/protector role. However, the stories told by the informants placed a great emphasis on the nurturant potential in the father role. Clearly what these informants desired from their fathers, what they repeatedly felt was absent was care, connection, presence, approval.

We live in a time in which it is proposed that men can and should be involved, supportive parents. However, the primary role model for men who father today has been traditionally paternal - an embodiment of the good provider, chief disciplinarian. In the past an overwhelming acceptance of father as economic provider discouraged much open deviation. Researchers, guided by earlier ideologies of gender, asked questions that assumed compliance with a traditional division of responsibilities (Cohen, 1993). As a result many questions about the depth and substance of men's parental attachments went unasked. Levant (1990) writes that today's fathers have been socialized to be like their fathers. They did not, as boys, learn to access and become aware of their own feelings, nor did they learn to be empathically attuned to the feelings of others. Thus the tools these men take on their journey into parenthood are often the tools they received from their fathers; frequently their fathers tended to be absent, inexpressive, punitive (Wagenheim, 1990).

Eric readily acknowledged that it is primarily what he failed to receive from his father that has shaped his parenting style:

> I believe that my commitment to parenting is so strong because, in a nutshell, I hated the relationship that I had with my own father. It is pure and simple. I know how much I felt that I had missed out on growing up, a whole lot of activities and just doing things. Just having a parent that was aloof to you is hurting. It was hurtful on some level. I just was not going to do that with any of my kids. It would tear me up if I had kids who thought of me as I think of my father. But I know that is not going to happen. It is not going to happen yet every once in a while it comes up because of my history in my family of origin.

Eric attributes his commitment and greater intimacy with his daughter to the fact that he chooses to parent differently than his father. He perceives fault in the kind of role modeling he received as a child. Eric's attempt to consciously avoid replicating with his child the kind of relationship he recalled having with his own father is similar to other informants' responses. These men all described trying, wanting, expecting to be different than their own father. Indeed these "vertical linkages" (Daly, l993) are of paramount importance in the way that fathers shape their sense of identity. As these men looked at the generation that preceded them there emerged a clear picture of what they did not want to be. All informants desired to be "better" parents, more interactive, more involved . They spoke of wanting closer father-child relationships than they had themselves experienced. However, as several informants noted, it was not their fathers that they were rejecting but the kind of aloof orientation their fathers embodied. Such comments suggest that men can and do articulate larger, more involved notions of fathering. In seeking to avoid the same outcome with their own children the informants were advocating less exclusive involvement in the provider role and more attention to a supportive involvement.

People begin parenting without any intention of harming their children (Allen, 1993) but for any number of reasons, not the least of which is gender conditioning, fathers often develop destructive patterns of behavior that result in dysfunctional fathering:

> My family pattern - there was a lot of violence; physical, a lot of outbursts. My father had a lot of difficulty, not toward my mother but violence toward us kids. He would get really frustrated with us. Unlike my older

> brother and sister, when he would hit me I would bite him and kick him. Eventually I got thrown out of kindergarten. I couldn't go back into school until the family received some counselling. My mother had been trying to get my father into counselling for a long time. My father felt counselling was only for sick people and he wasn't sick. But it ended up that we all did go for help. (Sebastion)

A culture that tells men the way to happiness is to strive for perfection and external success; to numb feelings and repress needs often creates fathers who are distant and critical (Pittman, 1993).

Osherson (1986) holds that a man's primary difficulty lies in the area of feeling and expressing emotion. He writes that in order to understand the emotional aspect of self men need, on some level, to understand and work the unfinished business with their fathers. An obvious difficulty with this lies in how gender roles develop. A prevailing idea is that a woman's culture inherently suits her for the task of nurturing. Works such as Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), and Belenky et al (1986) offer variations on the assertion that women and men remain fundamentally different (but equal) because their gender modeling suits them for different tasks. Chodorow's position is that traditional mothering produces relational women and autonomous men. Gilligan (1982) uses Chodorow's work to back her claims that men and women have different "voices"; "boys have selves defined through separation and girls have selves delineated through connection" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 35). It is an old story - women are caring and compliant; men are self- oriented and assertive. Men are taught from an early age that they are independent, self- sufficient beings: Emotional dependence is considered feminine. "Men believe they must solve things on their own, do it on their own; needing support may be seen as a weakness" (Eric). It appears that the experience of fathering triggers memories of childhood. Without a comparative study it is impossible to know the degree to which informant reflections are influenced by their role as single parents. When questioned in this regard Philip responded:

> I have more time to think things through on my own. I feel very much alone in the parenting role, there is very little discussion and virtually no one to mirror back a reflection. So I think part of my getting a reflection is referring back to what I was taught, to what I know..... the influence of my own childhood.

Allen (1993) implies that in order to maintain on-going emotional attachment a father must develop sensitivity to his child. In so doing he is faced with the child's dependency needs, emotionality and irrationality. Facing emotions expressed by his children may also trigger emotions within himself, emotions that he had to suppress during his own childhood in order to be "masculine". Identifying with a child's emotions may offer an opportunity for a father to resolve past issues:

> Being a father has allowed me to re-experience the depth of that kind of emotion. It seems a kind of acceptable form for this new sensitivity to take place in. I do think that having a child allows one to get in touch with their emotions. (Eric)

The men of this study refer to childhood experience when discussing their current role as father; they speak to unresolved issues with their own fathers. Seemingly, there is an attempt to make meaning from the kind of relationship they experienced with their own father as they struggle learning how to be a father. Overall, informants perceive the kind of fathering they received to be a poor role model; yet the emphasis here is on form and not content. It is on a kind of emotional constriction they witnessed fathers living out rather than on father as an individual. There is a sense informants believe they learned more about how not to parent than how to parent from their fathers. There is also a sense that the participants of this study have used their experience as sons to help them learn more productive ways to father. Philip spoke of translating his emotional hurt into ways of being more present for his children:

> So what I know is that I have used the experience of his not coming to see me play soccer in a kind of reverse way. I always, unless I absolutely cannot avoid it, go and see my kids play sports, or watch them act in a play, or whatever it is they choose to do. I know, and I know from not

> having it, that is it really important just to be there and be supportive of what they do. And I also really enjoy going and taking part in their life that way. Sometimes I think I do it as much for myself as I do it for them. (Philip)

This study suggests that for single fathers parenting sparks memory causing each informant to examine more carefully his own childhood experiences; and in particular, the relationship to their own fathers.

The third theme, 'perceiving the male experience as primarily outer while the female experience is both inner and outer', is a direct quote of the second informant and a concept echoed many times, in many forms throughout all interviews. In examining this theme I will touch on the informant's sense of powerlessness and guilt that accompanied the marital breakdown. I will explore the conflict that accompanies gender role expectation and how these men struggle with what it means to parent outside the socially sanctioned container of marriage.

## Theme #3
## Perceiving the male experience as primarily outer while the female experience is both inner and outer.

> I think women have a strong nurturing sign. Part of the traditional woman's role was also taking care of the castle, there was lots in that which involved outer activity. Traditionally women have had a better balance because they had to take physical care of the home - cooking and washing as well as all the emotional stuff. Cooking and taking care of the house are just as outer as going to the office. The degree to which you relate with children is inner, but doing laundry is a task. So women have both task and emotional outlets, while in a man's world there is really very little that is emotionally oriented. (Sebastion)

Traditionally the tendency has been to look at the pain and stress of marital separation for fathers in terms of the loss of home and family life, yet the loss of a man's dreams, ideals, and hopes are equally as debilitating (Pichitino, 1983). In this study each informant articulates the pain he feels as the belief that "marriage is forever" shatters.

> I always wanted to have a 'normal' family. I looked forward to being a dad. I remember thinking that when I get married I am going to bring that old school back and 'just do it'! I didn't want my marriage to end. I had faith. I was always the romantic. It was my ideal - you make it work. I really wanted it and I did everything that I could to make it work. (Alex)

Each informant spoke of his responsibility in creating a successful family and the felt sense that failure to do so meant letting his children down. Feelings of guilt and powerlessness dominated discussion around the separation process:

> I wanted to get back together. I wanted the marriage and also I thought that it was the best thing for our daughter, for any child, that the parents be together and work out their problems. The guilt I remember feeling, experiencing, was that I was letting my daughter down. She was to be coming from a divorced family. I thought of families as essentially being a father, a mother, and the kids. And so I saw her as the product of a divorced family and I felt so guilty and so powerless. (Eric)

In addition to feelings of powerlessness and guilt that accompany marital separation research indicates that many couples experience difficulty determining where the former spousal relationship ends and the new parental relationship begins (McKenry & Price, 1990). Many divorced persons continue to experience feelings of attachment toward their former partner:

> I would go for dinner with my former wife, her new partner and our daughter. I don't know if it was just a neediness to maintain a relationship with her. I was still hurting. There was an open wound from the split and under the guise of wanting to make it as good as possible for my daughter I would go with them. Looking back I think it was me having a wound, just wanting some contact. (Alex)

As partners separate and begin to create new lives there is much confusion. It is a time of many complex issues involving fear, anger, powerlessness, loneliness, regret and grief. Divorce engenders feelings of failure and inadequacy. Tension often results when one feels one is not living up to expectations. Our culture promotes the belief that a man's self-image is dependent upon his achievements (Clatterbaugh, 1990). This is an oppressive belief and coupled with the male tendency to deny dependency needs it is understandable that studies indicate the divorce process may have a greater emotional impact on men (O'Neil, 1990).

> I did get support from my therapist, although it took me quite a while and a lot of agony before I even decided to seek out that kind of help. I felt very received by the therapist, understood. But I never talked to any men about my situation. I hardly talked to anybody. I don't remember having a deep, face-to-face, strong conversation with anybody about my experience. No one supported me. I was a loser. I felt I should just live with myself, quietly if possible - not bother anybody. And, of course I had my own guilt. Now I have pretty much gotten over it. It is still a wound that I can go into, but I do get on with my life. (Philip)

For many men their wives had been their closest intimate and often the only person with whom they shared feelings. When the marriage breaks down they are left isolated and in that isolation must begin to deal with issues of repressed feeling and denied dependency needs. For many men social support is minimal or an altogether deprived facet of their lives. The experience of neither seeking out nor expecting support as lived out by the informants during marital separation parallels the belief that the male experience is primarily concerned with outer (functional) aspects while the female experience is concerned with both the outer and inner (emotional).

Amid this confusion and pain separating men must begin to define a new kind of parenting role. All informants spoke of their sense of loss as well as feelings of guilt and powerlessness. When describing arrangements for custody made during separation all but one informant believed, seemingly without much reflection, that younger children should

be with their mother. And without exception all men feared that following the separation their children would be closer to their mother than to themselves. Eric, Sebastion and Philip all held that younger children should remain with their mother if parents separated: "I believe children belong with their mother. In particular when they are younger. By the time they are in their mid-teens it is different but certainly up until twelve, thirteen it is very important they are with their mom" (Sebastion). Presently all three informants hold a somewhat broader perspective on this issue. There is not, it seems, so much a desire to change arrangements made at the time of separation as there is a willingness to re-examine beliefs previously held:

> I think it is part of the deep cognitive schema. It exists. We do things that are congruent with that, yet we are not really aware of that belief being there. We just do. It is like when I thought my daughter should go with her mom, even though I know I am a competent, loving parent. It was based upon beliefs and values and also upon my own experience. Like you and I have just talked - how the women in my life, for me, were symbols of safety and nurturing. (Eric)

Philip speaks of a similar tendency to challenge the beliefs he held at the time of separation:

> Mothers are not more important than fathers to younger children but they are more influential. They have a role and they take on that role. My feelings about her job as a parent had to do with my own feeling. I didn't know what parenting was about. I was sure there was some difference in the female role so I just asked her advise or did what she said. Looking back I don't think that she knew much more than I did.
> Men tend to put women, as mothers, in front of themselves as fathers because that is how we were raised. It is difficult to know how to go about making a shift in this area.

In tandem with the belief that younger children should be with their mom is a fear that the children will be closer to their mother. The fathers of this study feared they would loose the relationship they experienced with their children which existed when they lived together as a family. In interview Eric stated:

> I had this one main fear - that she will be closer to her mom than she is to me. That her feelings for her mother will be stronger than her feelings for me. Mainly because her mom is her mom; she is a mom and she is a woman. As a child my feelings were always stronger for my mother. In fact, they still are.

Philip speaks to a similar fear of a diminished relationship with his children: "At first I feared my former wife would find another partner and he would assume the role of father. It was a real fear that I was dispensable, that I would loose my kids to someone else".

Clearly the fathers of this study care deeply about their children. Being a father is important to them, still fatherhood is not central to their identity. Fatherhood is not institutionalized in the way that motherhood is (Balin, 1993). Thus it would seem that the divorced father's biggest obstacle is not a question of his ability to parent, nor the fact that as a man he has not been socialized for both provider and domestic roles. Rather it is the fact that the separated father feels placed in a position of constantly having to prove himself. All this despite the fact that numerous studies indicate fathers are as competent parents as mothers:

> By this time I was involved with a lawyer and he told me that my chances of getting primary residence were like zero to nil. I had seen him a number of times and he said, you will not get custody. I went to another lawyer also, he told me - 'the judge will send your daughter to live with her mother'. They both said the year I stayed home to take care of her wouldn't really effect the judge's decision. (Eric)

While all informants readily acknowledged their competency as fathers they also continue to identify with the view of women as primary nurturers. All informants avoided use of the term "nurturing" when referring to the fathering role. However, it is ironic that not one informant identified being "the breadwinner" among the major responsibilities of his parenting tasks. When asked what they did as fathers, common responses centered upon supportive activities. For Sebastion fathering was best expressed through teaching

his children certain values; for Alex it meant guiding his child through difficult times; for Philip it was being emotionally supportive, physically affectionate, attending sporting events and other activities; for Eric it was being playful, creating a peaceful environment for his daughter and himself. Informants' answers placed a greater emphasis on the emotional dimension of the father role than on any other aspect; it was this dimension they most valued. Interestingly, despite the fact that these men were involved fathers caring for their children they consistently did not describe their parenting activity as nurturing. Yet they freely ascribed nurturing as a primary quality of mothering, and as an attribute of women in general.

What men feel, what they do not feel, and how they manage fear are critical in understanding their gender role conflict (May, 1990). Men's fear of their feminine side and of women has been noted in the literature for many years (Colman & Colman, 1988; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Woodman,1992). This fear seems central to men's inability to perceive their own process as inward. It seems there is a deep-seated fear that to acknowledge one's feelings (inner) weakens one's structure (outer):

> I would say that most men are terrified of their femininity because really there has never been permission. There are changes, in-roads being made. For example federal civil servants have just won maternity leave. Years ago that would have been laughed at. Laughter is often what males use in order to deal with their confusion. And one of the biggest confusion's for males is around homosexuality, it is around implied softness. (Philip)

This way of thinking supports Devor's (1989) premise:

> Children learn that to be masculine is better than to be feminine; to be male and masculine is to be best; to be female and masculine is to be second best; to be female and feminine is to be a 'good girl', but second class; and to be male and feminine is to be a traitor. (p. 59)

O'Neil (1982) writes that central to men's struggle with change are gender roles and gender role conflict. Gender roles are embodied in the behavior of men and women and culturally regarded as appropriate to men or to women. Devor (1989) defines gender

roles as "actions, thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs which distinguish one as a member of a gender category, that is masculine or feminine (p. vii). We speak of gender as socially constructed: The definition of masculinity and femininity are the product of an interplay among a variety of social forces. Gender roles are a core dimension of a person; these roles are learned and may change with the demands of adulthood and aging. Gender role conflict occurs most often during a time of crisis. An example of such crisis could be divorce and/or changes in the parenting structure (O' Neil, 1990). In such situations men often re-evaluate their gender role conditioning and their masculine self concept. Gender role transitions produce confusion and anxiety, yet they may also be useful in opening up internal parts of a man, expanding his self definition and promoting personal exploration and growth (Miedzian, 1992).

The men of this study acted in line with the traditional masculine gender role, for example - the belief that children belong with their mom; the need to provide for and protect their family unit even after separation:

> It is a male thing not to cause hardship on a woman. The man drives the car and opens doors. The man will move out rather than have her make those arrangements. I always just assumed that taking care of her was synonymous with taking care of my children. For a long time I didn't really separate the responsibility in my own mind. I felt guilty that I had left the marriage. She was taking the kids out of province. On some levels it made sense to me. She was going back to her home, to where she had support. I talked with a lawyer and was told I could try to stop the move but it would mean a court fight. I didn't want to create more problems, more pain for every one. So I moaned and groaned a lot but I didn't really do anything.
>
> There was lots of guilt because in the process of unraveling from a person I needed to unravel from I left my kids. They felt that and I felt their pain. (Philip)

> Yes, I paid for her rent as well as mine. I see that I like feeling that I am a caring, protective person and it is my role within this group of people to do

> that. They are my children. I want to protect them and help them. My former wife makes less money that I do and I feel it is incumbent upon me to help out. (Sebastion)

Given such clearly delineated gender roles I began to explore what it was that bound the informants of this study so strongly to their children when much of the literature suggests that divorced fathers often neglect their responsibilities (Berman, l985). I found a prevailing belief that taking responsibility is what fathers do. Neglecting their children, on any level, was not even a consideration. Strong commitment was clearly articulated; the emotional connection acknowledged:

> You bring a child into the world and you don't just walk away from it. I was motivated to maintain the connection because I love my daughter and felt an obligation. It was an obligation and duty which I had no problem with, to be there for her. And you never walk away from that. It is not an obligation where you "gotta do it," that is not what I mean. You have a kid and you have a kid and you are there. I loved her and I was also concerned with her well being and with my own. She became part of my life. I know that I could never go through life having a child and not having any sort of relationship, I could never do that. (Eric)

There was an intrinsic connection and an obligation to parent present with each informant. "It is almost inconceivable to me that someone wouldn't want to be involved with their kids, even after they're separated. But I know some men just don't ever really connect with their kids..... it is something that I don't really understand" (Sebastion).

All informants acknowledged their divorce and the re-defining of the father role as painful; all spoke of feeling powerless; all acknowledged feelings of vulnerability. While these men clearly felt their pain and confusion and were conflicted as their role began to change, there was little acknowledgment of the struggle as internal. In the main the reference was to the outer process. Moreover, there was minimal discussion and virtually no challenge regarding how the societal impacted them. When questioned as to what advise he may have for other men facing a situation similar to the one he faced Philip replied:

> I would tell other men who were thinking of separating not to be involved in another relationship. If they can discipline that then they won't be wrong. I would tell them to find a good lawyer, learn all the parameters of the thing. Get different advise because I got wrong advice. Really consider carefully all the options. Despite all this it is still going to be very painful. My perception is that there is still more power with the woman in this situation. You can temper that but be aware you are fighting an uphill battle. Ultimately you have to learn to fill the hole. You have to learn what the new relationship with the children is like. It is a new relationship and it is a different relationship and to know that there is one. So it is all a process of coming to terms with the fact that you haven't lost your kids. In some ways, the new relationship is a more real one. But it is all painful.

Informants readily, and in some detail, described their fears, sense of powerlessness, and pain following the turmoil of divorce and re-establishing a new role as a single parent. And they all tended to dismiss the importance of their emotions. Eric, Alex, and Sebastion described their dependency longings as "neediness". There was an inherent belief that such neediness was not okay. Rather it was something to get over, to make better, as if dependency in a male is a forbidden state. Although two of the informants were sporadically involved with a men's group there was no indication that they received much emotional support for their situation. According to Kaufman (1993) close affective bonds of intimacy with other men are warded off because of homophobic concerns present throughout the culture. Kaufman holds that a system which encourages dominance of other males and aggressive competition contributes to the emotional isolation of men from one another.

There has been much discussion of late around the new man; a new, softer male, less macho, more ready to examine his own feelings and more open to the feelings of others. According to some this new man is very much the result of a trend toward greater participation by men in child rearing (Colman & Colman, 1988). The assumption is that the more men have to do with children, the more involved they become in children's lives, and the more responsible they feel for meeting children's needs, the more likely they are to

develop new man attitudes and behaviors. Wilson (1990) writes, "Important feminist writers, such as French assume a link and see new man behavior as essential to the very survival of the species. Taubman (1986) sees the solution to male domestic violence as the integration of men into family life. Men's attitudes toward women, Taubman argues will be altered and egalitarian attitudes will replace patriarchal ones as men take greater responsibility for parenting" (p. 15). This belief holds that increasing men's involvement with their children will bring about important changes in masculinity which will, in turn, have important consequences for men, women and children. This study fails to completely support such connection.

For the fathers of this study their relative high degree of involvement in their children's daily care has seemingly not altered their basic orientation toward masculine and feminine roles. A picture emerges of a group of men vitally, continuously, and consciously concerned about and involved with their children's lives yet expressing quite conventional and traditional attitudes about gender roles and parenting. The perception of female experience as both inner (feeling) and outer (functional) while the male experience as primarily functional appears to be deeply entrenched and is visible in both the thought process and behavior of the informants.

Summary

The themes advanced are intended to offer insights into the meanings the informants utilize in their cultural world. Themes offer a structural frame work yet it is a structure that is neither precisely delineated nor detached. Themes are interconnected, intertwined, and multi layered; themes influence and are influenced by each other. And as noted by Spradley (1987) themes do not always operate at a conscious, interpretive level of awareness; often themes remain at the tacit level of knowledge. "Themes come to be taken for granted; they slip into that area of knowledge where people are not quite aware or seldom find the need to express what they know" (p. 188). The themes presented reflect my interpretation of how these four men understand their lived experience as fathers following divorce.

In the following chapter I will offer reflections upon the study through a discussion of findings, limitations of the work, implications for counselling, and suggestions for further research.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Significance of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study has been to explore how four men understand, interpret and live out the experience of being fathers following the dissolution of their marriage. In simplistic terms the ethnographic method searches out aspects of informants' experience that reflect not only their cognitive understanding but also their social-structural reality. Ethnography's emphasis on cultural meaning systems requires that the researcher explore not only the inner structures of experience but also the outer structures influenced by cultural learning and expectation (Banister, 1991).

### Discussion

Father is often considered the expendable parent (Steele, 1991) or, at best, the secondary parent. Descriptive phrases such as father absence, father hunger, Disneyland dad, are commonly used in this regard. Indeed, statistics indicate that after five years less than one half of all non-custodial fathers remain involved with their children (Wallerstein & Blakesless, 1990).

This ethnographic study focused on men who remained actively connected with their children following divorce. During interview they spoke of the grief and loss suffered over the marital breakdown as well as feelings of guilt over the loss of everyday contact with their child/ren. They spoke to the fear of losing their child/ren to the mother and to the havoc separation wreaked upon their image of fatherhood. The informants of this study are men who understand, whether they speak directly of it or not, that absence of the father is a perilous condition for children. These men recognize they have a vital contribution to make in their children's lives and are both unable and unwilling to neglect their responsibility; they are men who understand a sense of reciprocity in the parent-child relationship.

People are shaped by their culture. The men of this study are strongly influenced by an interpretation of masculine as strong, active, independent, competitive and feminine as soft, nurturing, altruistic and connected. At the same time, due in some measure to the women's movement, our collective belief in how gender roles are represented changes. It was my intent to discover and describe how men who remained actively involved in a fathering role view themselves and their world, what cognitive information they use to interpret lived experience.

Several informants described their emotional state as "needy" following separation. Neediness was consistently perceived as a weakness by informants. Whatever the state of the marriage it was clear that the marital relationship had filled an emotional role; when it ended the emotional life emptied. There was awareness of a need to "fill the hole" created by divorce. Yet despite such awareness, as well as a pervasive sense of loneliness and isolation described by informants, not one spoke of reaching out to connect with others. Indeed support was not viewed as necessary in dealing with loss and each informant, on some level, followed the male dictate to get on with it - a belief that anything can be overcome by will power and sheer determination. Thus, the pain of being left, the hurt over "failing", the sense of vulnerability were emotional needs that were recognized yet not directly addressed. The suppression of emotional needs leads not to less but to greater emotional dependency (Kaufman, 1993).

In describing the on-going process of fathering after divorce each man identified himself as a caring, competent parent; all spoke to understanding a more integrated self. However despite the ability to recognize success in adapting to new and shifting roles, these men's lived experience was restricted, to varying degrees, by traditional expectations of fathers. Not one informant used the adjective 'nurturing' when describing his fathering style. Any description of nurturing activity was done in terms of mothering. Each informant held an image of himself as a competent, caring father however, there was a continual deferring of father's ability to the ability of mother, who is viewed as the

nurturing caregiver. As noted there is frequent mention of the fear of losing the child/ren to mother; of the child/ren being closer to mother; of the child/ren being able to learn certain vital things only from mother. In other words these men's parenting is shaped by a pervasive belief that they are somehow not as well suited to the job. Informants subscribe to a traditional division of labor in which women are primarily nurturers and men providers. Indeed, the informant's fundamental view of self seems to remain as protector/provider.

There was a strong need to differentiate what is 'masculine' from what is 'feminine' along traditional lines. Thus the men's felt experience and how they viewed their role as father was often at odds. What is outstanding are these men's: (1) denial of needs in dealing with feelings of vulnerability, fear, and sadness; (2) an inability to name in themselves activity that has traditionally been labeled feminine; and (3) an inability to view traits perceived as feminine as positive and useful in developing their potential. It is suggested by those who support increased men's involvement in their children's lives that such involvement will bring about important changes in masculinity. This, in turn, will have important consequences for both men and women (Wilson, 1990). I would suggest that for the informants of this study the norms regarding fathering remain traditional. Informants remained strongly, and at times unconsciously, influenced by a traditional belief system and archetypal images of masculinity. There is an aversion to describing nurturing as a male activity. The assumption that men who assume a nurturing role will have a perceptible shift in their sense of masculinity is not born out.

However, it is encouraging that informants' felt experience is at odds with their concept of a masculine self. Much of sex-role allocation may be explained by the way we rear children, by the sexual division of labor, by definitions of what is appropriate to the sexes, and by social pressure exerted to keep each in place. Gender roles are created by humans and are equally capable of being altered by them. There are those who argue that men resist any alterations in roles because of they occupy a privileged position in society

(Goode, 1992). However although much self definition revolved around the ideology of being masculine the men of this study did not carry out the social prescriptions of competition and aggression nor did they understand themselves to be emotionally anesthetized. Indeed they engaged in caring father role despite isolation and a felt lack of support.

The fact their lived experience as fathers contradicted the prescribed masculine role is hopeful. As men come to understand the price they pay for male privilege in terms of mortality, isolation, and a restricted sense of self (Farrell, 1993) they may begin to perceive how deeply limiting the male role can be. Thus despite the careful, and sometime unconscious separation of their masculine and feminine aspects there is a felt sense these men travel a new path. As they begin to piece together present experience they engage in the process of creating a new system of cultural meaning. There is an emerging cultural context. The themes presented: Connecting to a more emotional self; opening to childhood experiences with emphasis on unresolved father issues; and perceiving male experience as primarily outer and female experience as both inner and outer are all paths to new understandings.

Much of the informants experience has been about death and rebirth. Letting go of an old way of being and birthing of a new relationship both within themselves and with their children. In this process there is little from the past to guide the way. We live in changing times in which old meaning systems of how the family functions breaks down. These men are pioneers in forging a new cultural norm for fathering. Each man began the task of re-parenting without a known structure; these men did not seek out, nor did they experience, a felt sense of being supported in their new roles. They faced a very real fear of losing their child/ren to the mother whom they unquestionably perceived as the true parent. Their continued involvement was motivated by both a sense of responsibility and by the bond they felt with their child/ren.

Ironically, all informants spoke to a lack of connection with their own

fathers, often describing men who were physically present but often emotionally and energetically unavailable. Fathers were a "big" part of their childhood primarily in negative ways - remote, angry, repressed. Informants' fathers had a strong residual presence in their own fathering role; the primary effect of this was to compensate for perceived deprivations rather than imitate known patterns. Several men spoke openingly of using the experience of being fathered as a role model for how not to parent.

Part of the "gain" for these men may be that as they learn to shift attention away from the structure of relationship meaning moves to the soul of relationship. Indeed, all informants advised that as they learn to connect with their child/ren in a more real, less obstructed, manner they found more of themselves. They begin to integrate this experience into a sense of a more complete self. Each man in this study spoke of his opportunity to define fatherhood to himself for the first time in honest and intimate terms. In this new relationship father and child may begin to shape an understanding of what they have taken for granted in one anothers' lives. The male role to protect expands to includes protecting the quality of relationship.

## Limitations of the Study

There has been no experimental intervention undertaken in this work; nor have I outlined a series of questions to be asked. Instead I have spoken to four men and extracted from the conversations passages of words in which they speak directly or indirectly about their experience as fathers following divorce. I did not intend this study to be representative of men's experience of parenting following divorce. The limited number of informants as well as the fact that the men were self-selected into the study severely limits the generalizability of any findings. I suspect that more informants would broaden out the scope of information, giving added substance to the patterns that emerged. This study does, however, highlight some important issues. It uncovers some truths about four men's experience in the fathering role and explicates an understanding of

the cultural knowledge four fathers use to organize their behavior and to interpret their parenting experience following divorce.

This is a time of many changes in the fathering role. This research offers a portrait of what it means to be a father. Like any photograph it represents a single reality at a given point in time. It is not representative of all fathers' voices. Rather it offers insight into the meaning of fatherhood following divorce as it emerges out of the experience of these four parents.

Spradley (1979) speaks of the ethnographer's ability both to discover "reality" as depicted by the informants and to describe this reality, or insider perspective, in a manner understandable to outsiders. Spradley goes on to imply that themes do not always function at a level of conscious interpretation, but often at a taken for granted level; he states "much of cultural knowledge is tacit, taken for granted, and outside awareness" (p. 49). Thus, despite whatever precautions I take, however mindfully I manage energy, thematic descriptions are limited by my reflections and my interpretation.

## Implications for Counselling

Knowledge develops through reflection on lived experience; personal change occurs by re-imagining the deeper story of our lives (Schnitzer, 1993). This study offers information into how four men live out and interpret the meaning of their experience as fathers following divorce. It reflects on their pain, their sense of self and their relationships with their children; it examines their beliefs and ideals, where they feel whole and how they feel broken. This study refers to a deep identification with gender roles and the resulting conflict as roles change. It attempts to weave together various strands of experience into a larger tapestry of cultural understanding. Therefore, what this study offers is both knowledge and tacit understanding into the informant's shared world. From a counselling perspective transformation occurs with knowledge and understanding. Knowledge promotes empathy and is useful in creating a shift in perception; a softer gaze,

a mindful presence, a willingness to embrace the whole person in the context of their culture. From work on this study I would suggest the following areas as focal points for counsellor consideration:

1- The seeming reluctance of separating men to seek out support could be directly addressed. Emotional needs don't disappear; suppressed needs are held in check and tend to clog up emotional power.

2 - Recently scholars have begun to apply insights generated by feminist principles to research about men, including men as fathers (Blain, 1993). These researchers maintain that the lives and experiences of men in western society, like those of women, are gendered and cannot be understood except as constructed by gender within the society. This research attempts to shed some light on how the experience of fathering remains strongly gendered, even without the presence of the mother. Understanding gender roles could assist men in addressing gender role conflict.

3 - An integration of feeling and experience into thought and behavior would further the "connecting to a more emotional self". This study has demonstrated a dichotomy between what men experience as important in relationship with their children, i.e., support, care, connection and the consistent avoidance of naming these qualities in themselves.

Counselling supports individual purpose and reality. Words are central to ethnography. As symbols, words imply more than their obvious and immediate meaning. In this respect, words have a wider 'unconscious' aspect than is ever precisely defined or fully explained. When one listens attentively, and consciously puts words together, patterns form and meanings emerge. We arrive at an understanding of tacit knowledge by recognizing how words are used. The various types of ethnographic questions - descriptive, contrast, structural, rating (Spradley, 1979) could be utilized in the counselling session to elicit information which could be used by the counsellor in understanding how clients construct their world.

> Every single word is full of secrets, full of associations; every words leads to another and another and another, down and down, through passages of dark and light. Every word has the capacity to start the story. And once we begin on it, there is no knowing what will happen. (Ventura, 1993, p.12)

Suggestions for Further Research

Each thematic description could be researched in depth to expand understanding. Further study into the area of changing gender roles and gender role conflict would offer valuable knowledge for both men and women following divorce. Given the rapidly changing norms around the family, research into how couples separate could offer a valuable contribution to issues of grief, loss, self esteem and changing roles. As well, emphasis on the process of separation would be useful in assisting children of divorced parents. Indeed it is not only the way parents treat their children, but also the way they treat each other that teaches children indelible lessons about relationship. The stability and behavior of both parents are major predictors of a child's ability to develop satisfying, intimate relationships as adults (Kranz, 1988). It would be of interest to examine the tacit information that people draw upon during separation and divorce. Our culture is versed in an adversarial model of separation that has done little to promote the healthy dissolution of relationship or to further the understanding that all action has consequence. There are no rules governing how couples say good bye, however there is responsibility and there is choice.

Concluding Note

In this study I have examined, from a father's perspective, the experience of parenting following divorce. I have attempted to explore the knowledge and understandings my informants use to order and interpret their realities. What I have come to understand is that the life of a parent and the life of a child remain intertwined; there is

mystery in this connection that does not recede. As the literature indicates some parents may choose to deny the connection, to minimize the relationship. It is thereby possible to achieve a temporary freedom from interdependency. However, such freedom is illusory and inevitably the truths of the parent-child relationship are felt, and they are felt not only individually but by the entire society. How we, collectively, encounter the significance of fathers in their children's lives, how we understand and value these relationships, illuminates not only the relationship described by the presence of fathers with children but it illuminates all human relationship - presently ongoing, remembered, and most assuredly, imagined.

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## Appendix A

Informed Consent
Men's experience of parenting following divorce:
An ethnographic study

It has been explained to me that the purpose of this research is to explore men's experience and understanding of what it means to parent following the dissolution of their marriage. The aim of the study is to offer insight into men's experience in an area that has received very little attention. The information for this study will be gathered by way of individual tape-recorded interview; it is anticipated each participant will be involved in two separate interviews of approximately one to three hours each.

_ I understand that I can refuse to answer any or all questions without prejudice.

_ I understand that any information given within the course of the interview will be held in strictest confidence: In no way will my identity be revealed during any stage of the data analysis or in publication. I further understand that upon completion of the study any tape recording will be destroyed.

_ I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

_ I understand that if I have any questions I may contact the researcher, Janet Champion at
598-0498 or the research supervisor, Dr. Vance Peavy at 721-7799 or 384-0612.

Having read and understood the nature of this research and my participation in it, my signature below signifies my willingness to participate.

_____ (date)

_____ (signature)

_____ (date)

_____ (witness)

# APPENDIX B

Demographic Information

Participant's Code #:

Age:

Education completed:

Occupation:

Date of marriage:

Date of separation/ divorce:

Number of children and ages:

Arrangement for shared parenting time:

Individual counselling experience:

Support group experience:

# APPENDIX C

## Glossary of Terms

Ethnography: is the work of observing, documenting and analyzing cultural reality in order to grasp the experience of people in their environment.

Informant: is, first and foremost, a native speaker; the "subject of the research who becomes a teacher; the means through which an ethnographer comes to understand the culture under study.

Culture: is the knowledge people use to generate and interpret social behavior. This knowledge is, in part, learned and, to a degree, shared (Spradley, 1979).

Ethnographer: writes culture with the aim of conveying the feel as well as the facts of an observed event.

Translation competence: is the ability to translate the meanings of one culture into a form that is appropriate to another culture (Spradley, 1979).

Ethnographic explanation: is concerned with explaining the interview process to the informant. This includes reasons for asking various kinds of questions; encouraging the informant to describe the culture in personal terms; and stating why the researcher writes things down and makes a taped record of the interview.

Survey questions: are also referred to as 'grand tour' questions by Spradley (1979). An ethnographer asks for a verbal account (of space, time, events, people, activities, objects) with the goal of obtaining a description of the significant features of the cultural scene.

Emic perspective: is the insider or native perspective of reality; it is instrumental to understand and accurately describe situations and behaviors (Fetterman, 1989).

Folk terms: are symbols used by the informant to create cultural meaning.

Tactic cultural knowledge: refers to fundamental assumptions that a native makes. This knowledge is indirectly revealed through speech, behavior and use of artifacts.

Explicit cultural knowledge: is information that is openly and directly understood, and from which inferences are easily made. This knowledge is directly revealed through speech.

Thick description: is a written record of cultural interpretations; it is more interpretive and analytic than mainstream ethnographic work and tends to explore deeper meaning structures (van Manen, 1990). Thick description is interpretive and captures the meaning persons bring to their experience (Denzin, 1989).

Domain: is the symbolic category that includes other categories. Domains are the first and most important unit of analysis in ethnographic research (Spradley, 1979).

## Appendix D

Universal Semantic Relationships
(Spradley, 1979, p.111)

1. Strict inclusion: X is a kind of Y
2. Spatial X is a place in Y; X is a part of Y
3. Cause-effect: X is a result of Y; X is a cause of Y
4. Rationale: X is a reason for doing Y
5. Location for action: X is a place for doing Y
6. Function: X is used for Y
7. Means-end: X is a way to do Y
8. Sequence: X is a step (stage) in Y
9. Attribution: X is an attribute (characteristic) of Y

## Appendix E

Kinds of Structural Questions
(Spradley, 1979: p. 126)

1. Verification Questions
   1.1. Domain Verification Questions
   1.2 Included Term Verification Questions
   1.3. Semantic Relationship Verification Questions
   1.4. Native-Language Verification Questions

2. Cover Term Questions

3. Included Term Questions

4. Substitution Frame Questions

5. Card Sorting Structural Questions

## Appendix F

Kinds of Contrast Questions
(Spradley, 1979: p. 160)

1. Contrast verification questions
2. Directed contrast questions
3. Dyadic contrast questions
4. Triadic contrast questions
5. Contrast set sorting questions
6. Twenty Questions game
7. Rating questions

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