

Understanding the Essence of the
Relationship Between Big and Little Brothers and Sisters:
A Phenomenological Study

by

Marney Rochelle Thompson
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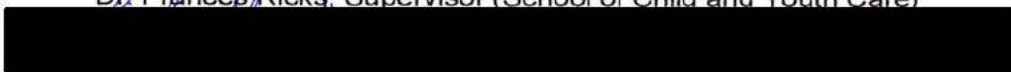
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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard



Dr. Frances Ricks, Supervisor (School of Child and Youth Care)



Dr. Carol Stuart, Departmental Member (School of Child and Youth Care)



Dr. Max Uhlemann, Outside Member (Department of Psychological Foundations)



Dr. David De Rosenroll, External Examiner

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University of Victoria

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Supervisor: Dr. Frances Ricks

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on relationships between Big and Little Brothers and Sisters, within the Big Brothers and Sisters program. The essence of these relationships is discovered through phenomenological inquiry. Drawing from the literature in child and youth care, education, mentoring and on the Big Brothers and Sisters program, a framework was designed to guide this inquiry. Through in-person, individual interviews with Big and Little Brothers and Sisters, this study explored the formation and meaning of relationships developed between children and non-family adults. The five universal themes discussed are: Turning a Match into Our Friendship, Actively Being and Becoming, Mutual Ownership, Acceptance and Relatedness, and Personal Benefit. Illuminating the essence of relationships between children and non-family adults, the findings of this study point out the personal and dynamic factors which make these relationships meaningful. The final chapter explains the significance and implications of this study and suggests avenues for further research in this area.

Examiners:

[REDACTED]

Dr. Frances Ricks, Supervisor (School of Child and Youth Care)

[REDACTED]

Dr. Carol Stuart, Departmental Member (School of Child and Youth Care)

[REDACTED]

Dr. Max Uhlemann, Outside Member (Department of Psychological Foundations)

[REDACTED]

Dr. David De Rosenroll, External Examiner

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Bigs and Littles who allowed me into their lives and relationships. The voices of those people I interviewed followed me through the full circle of this research process. From beginning to end they have been a source of deep inspiration, thought, and fulfillment. I also thank my past colleagues and friends, the staff at BBBS of Victoria. Their constant availability and encouragement were essential to my completion of this work. I also thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Frances Ricks for agreeing to guide me through this project and for sharing with me her wisdom, stamina, and faith. Finally, I thank the other members of my committee, Drs. Carol Stuart and Max Uhlemann for their contributions and support.

Dedication

To longtime Big Brother Alex Leatham, who gives to himself through giving to others, and to my family who have taught me the same.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

“Through relationships, children learn about who they are and about the worlds in which they live. Through relationships they come to experience their separateness, their uniqueness and, ultimately, their relatedness. The pathway is laden with discoveries and beset with hazards but the process is as compelling as life itself ... for that is precisely what it is.”

(Fewster, 1991, p. 85).

Relationships comprise the foundation of our work, family and personal lives. Through relationships with other people, as professionals, parents, citizens, children and adults, we come to an awareness and understanding of who we are. Through experiencing our relationships we create our values and beliefs, our wishes and goals, and our world view. Relationships take many different forms; brief, empowering, destructive, spontaneous, casual, transformational or functional. Relationship includes a feeling or sense of emotional bonding between people, characterized by a mutual recognition and understanding, that concurrently maintains and nurtures a sense of selfhood and at-oneness (Harris-Perleman, 1983).

Despite my inclination to ask broad and far-reaching questions in general about the nature of relationship, I am particularly interested in the nature of relationship which fosters health and well-being in children and youth in the context of Child and Youth Care practice. Therefore, the focus of this study was the relationship between a Big and Little at Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Victoria Capital Region (BBBS).

Personal and Practice Issues

As an eternally curious person, presently engaged in rewarding and challenging relationships in many of the situations listed in the introduction, I often contemplate the infinite forms and multiple dimensions of interpersonal relationships. I find these thoughts and conversation about relationships infinitely interesting, confusing and inspiring. This indefinite composition of wonder and feeling about the essence of relationship has persisted throughout my childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and was the driving force behind my decision to put relationship at the heart of my thesis research.

Now, reflecting on my work experience, it seems almost predestined that my first job, after graduating from the School of Child and Youth Care (SCYC) at the University of Victoria (UVIC), would be as a caseworker in an organization such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Victoria. Working at BBBS provided me with a rare opportunity to do work that employed both my personal beliefs and values about relationships, as well as the skills and knowledge about relationship development which were critical in my education in child and youth care (CYC). At the core of the BBBS movement are deeply held values and beliefs which stress the importance of relationships between children, youth, and adults. I moved through and out of my work in the BBBS organization wondering about many of the same questions about relationships which I held when I began. Naturally, these questions began to focus on the structure and meaning of relationships between unrelated children and adults, such as those common to BBBS, CYC, and public education.

As a caseworker at BBBS it was my responsibility to encourage and support the development of positive relationships between children and adults. The BBBS organization calls these relationships matches; the adult volunteer is commonly referred to as a Big and the child as a Little. The concern that arose from my practice experience at BBBS, and later stretched into larger issues about the work I do in CYC, was that few practitioners (myself included) who are necessarily invited to form relationships with children, spoke openly or with a high degree of confidence or clarity about what it was they do to establish and develop relationships with children. Ironically, in CYC we are constantly in the business of creating caring relationships between and with children, youth and families; yet, after working in the CYC field for several years and studying the related literature, I found the depth and clarity of discourse or opinion on the essence of helping relationships between children and adults was minimal.

When I worked at BBBS I often heard myself and my colleagues declaring to volunteers and parents what were in essence our personal/professional 'prescriptions' for a 'successful' match. The concern I had was not that these prescriptions were illogical or even ineffective, but rather my sense that they were a fusion of our own experiences in relationship and interpretations of outdated organizational and philosophical assumptions, instead of a true examination of the personal accounts of Bigs' and Littles' experiences in successful matches.

At BBBS, Bigs and parents often asked caseworkers what they could do to make their match relationships more intimate or rewarding. I always engaged in those conversations with conflicted feelings of responsibility and reservation.

This situation was difficult for me because my personal/professional beliefs and values about relationship conflicted with the organizational expectations and responsibilities I accepted when I was hired by BBBS. For myself the dilemma was fourfold: I didn't believe there was a universal formula for 'good' relationships in any context, I had not experienced being a Big or a Little, I knew the interpersonal aspects of match relationships had not been researched, and yet my job required that I introduce a Big and a Little and guide them into a mutually rewarding relationship that supported the ongoing development of the child.

Scope of the Problem

Many human service organizations neglect careful exploration of the phenomenon of helping or caring relationships. This oversight prevails across a variety of human service disciplines including child and youth care, social work, nursing, medicine, education, and public administration. In each of these disciplines there surfaces a contradiction between rhetoric and practice where the primacy of the one-to-one relationship is accepted outright, and yet scant time is allotted in practice or academia for identifying or advancing the skills that contribute to effective helping relationships. Harris-Perleman (1983) confirms this supposition stating "we tend to relate to those who seek our help "just naturally", turned on by some people turned off by others" (p. 3). She further asserts that:

if we are serious about helping people, [we need] to raise this experience called "relationship" to our conscious and careful consideration in order to be able to use it in competent and careful ways in the best interests of those we serve (Harris-Perleman, 1983, p. 4).

It is my opinion that the decline in professional attention to the finer elements of relationship development is due in part to an increasingly technological and impersonal culture where social problems are debated and addressed at an abstracted global level. This unfortunately eclipses the needs of the individual and front-line service provider. Another reason for the low volume of research conducted in this area is that the potential scope of acceptable characteristics and definitions of relationship does not easily lend itself to precise study. Relationships are infinitely varied, often dynamic, highly subjective, and due to their enigmatic potential for growth and/or loss, somewhat intangible.

Some professional and paraprofessional people involved in helping relationships fear that if the essence of relationship could be defined there would be a significant cost to the quality of helping relationships in the future. The general expressed fear is that when something as complex and abstract as relationship is deconstructed in an effort to make it more understandable, something vital and spontaneous could be lost in the translation. One other professional suggested that it may instead be a fear from professionals that their work will be demystified (personal communication with Frances Ricks, October, 21, 1996).

My experience and confusion about relationships in child and youth care has been addressed in the literature in relationships. Basically the literature confirms my experience and notes that the phenomenon of relationship development between non-related adults and children is hardly researched. Therefore it is also not clearly understood nor conceptualized by professionals,

educators or practitioners who work with children, youth, and their families (Anglin, 1990; Austin & Halpin, 1987; Fewster, 1991; Ricks, 1992).

Contribution of Further Research

Regardless of what explanations are used to tolerate the lack of informed discourse about the phenomenon of relationship, the unfailing reality is that “ a newcomer to the human services, whether in social work or some other field, is likely to find meager guidance in recent writings on the what, how and why of relationship” (Harris-Perlman, 1983, p. 220). Moreover, when professionals in the field are asked what they do to establish relationships, the strategies which they describe often originate in highly individual and varied orientations to the acts of helping and relating. Additional research into the phenomena of relationship, even within the unique climate of BBBS, serves the dual purposes of stimulating professional discussion and augmenting the minimal research which presently exists.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of the relationship between Bigs and Littles according to their experience of that relationship. This exploration was intended to give voice to the experiential wisdom of Bigs and Littles in an effort to begin to describe and understand the phenomenon of relationship within the BBBS setting. Given the overall purpose of this study, the aims and objectives were as follows:

- 1. To develop an understanding of relationships between Bigs and Littles in the BBBS program.**

2. To situate the understanding of those relationships in the lived experience of the people who constitute those relationships, i.e. Bigs and Littles.

3. To communicate the understanding of those relationships to the local and national BBBS communities, through discussion and publication of the results of this study.

Research Questions

The primary research question was:

1. According to Bigs and Littles, what is the essence of the relationship between Bigs and Littles?

Additional research questions which supplemented the above question were:

A. What factors or events do the Bigs and Littles hold as meaningful in the development of their relationship?

B. What aspects of the relationship between Bigs and Littles are assigned and/or negotiated and who assigns these roles?

C. What do Bigs and Littles believe is the importance of their relationship to themselves and each other?

These research questions were the product of my experience as a caseworker at BBBS and the countless detailed and informal discussions I have had with Bigs, Littles, parents, board members, caseworkers and members of the community at large about the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program.

Research and Practice Context - BBBS

To place this research in the context of BBBS practice the next section is an extensive orientation to the organizational context of BBBS, beginning with a glossary of terms and acronyms common to BBBS. The orientation includes: the history of BBBS, a contemporary profile of BBBS in Canada, a description of BBBS in Victoria, and an explanation of the operational process of becoming a

Big or a Little.

BBBS terminology.

BBBS • This acronym is used on most Big Brothers and Big Sisters literature and is a shorthand version of Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

BIG • This term used by parents, children, volunteers, and staff refers to either a Big Brother or Big Sister.

LITTLE • This term used by parents, children, volunteers and staff refers to either a Little Brother or Little Sister.

BB • This acronym is used on most Big Brothers and Big Sisters literature and represents the shorthand version of Big Brother.

BS • This acronym is used on most Big Brothers and Big Sisters literature and represents the shorthand version of Big Sister.

LB • This acronym is used on most Big Brothers and Big Sisters literature and represents the shorthand version of Little Brother.

LS • This acronym is used on most Big Brothers and Big Sisters literature and represents the shorthand version of Little Sister.

MATCH • This term refers to the relationship between a Big and Little.

BBBS History

According to brochures distributed by BBBS of Victoria the idea of adult men acting as a 'Big Brother' to young boys first surfaced in Cincinnati in 1903 and New York in 1904 (BBBS, 1994). Two men, Irvin Westheimer in Cincinnati and Ernst Coulter in New York, recognized the importance of adult male friendship for boys from fatherless families and lobbied their friends and business partners to form relationships with these boys. In 1909, the first Big Brother agency was established in New York, and by 1946 there were 13 more agencies across the US and Canada. In Canada, Big Brothers began in 1913 with a

loosely organized group of men who informally met with boys linked to the youth probation system. This Canadian group persisted in their informal activities with fatherless boys over the next fifty years. In 1964 Big Brothers of Canada was chartered by the Canadian government and in 1966 the first national executive director was appointed.

Contemporary profile of BBBS

Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada presently operates under the direction of a National Board of Directors headed by an executive director and extensive support staff. In Canada the organization represents approximately 170 chartered member agencies, 13,000 boys and girls living in single parent families, and over 30,000 volunteers. In addition to the National Board, each provincial region also maintains a Board of Directors; the Victoria office is linked to BBBS of British Columbia. In partnership these large organizations offer administrative and casework support in the form of staff training institutes, agency audits and annual reviews to all chartered BBBS of Canada agencies. Although communication with the provincial network is more frequent than with the national organization, the expectations of and services provided by the national organization are considerably more significant. BBBS of Canada holds the authority and power to grant or revoke individual member agency charters based on detailed program evaluations which occur every five years. BBBS of British Columbia's primary responsibility is to develop and enhance the profile of Big Brothers and Sisters in the province.

BBBS of Victoria

Big Brothers first came to Victoria in 1969, followed by Big Sisters in 1970, and in 1977 these two traditionally separate organizations amalgamated to form Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the Victoria Capital Regional District (BBBS, 1994). The Victoria BBBS agency represents over 200 matches between Bigs and Littles, and on an annual basis is consistently one of the fastest growing BBBS organizations in Canada. A non-profit society, BBBS of Victoria presently operates under the guidance of an executive director, a fourteen member board of directors, three caseworkers and a secretary. The mission statement of the Victoria agency states:

BBBS of the Victoria Capital Region, a non-profit society, recruits screens and selects volunteer adult friends for children who need additional companionship to enhance their opportunities for personal development and to monitor and provide ongoing support for those relationships (BBBS, 1994, p. 3).

In the process of obtaining a match, under the guidance of a caseworker, the Big, Little and parent move through three distinct and consecutive stages. These stages and the role of the caseworker are identified and described in the following section.

The Matching Process

Big-Little match relationships are the end result of a detailed screening and matching process carried out by the agency staff and experienced by parents and children who want to have a Big Brother or Sister as well as those adults wishing to be a Big Brother or Sister. The first stage **application and screening** is similar for both volunteers and families in that each must attend an orientation

session prior to making a formal application to the program. After attending an orientation session each side of the match (volunteer and parent) must complete an application form which outlines their reasons for getting involved with the program, as well as their basic expectations and personal interests. According to one caseworker, Bigs most often cited wanting to help in the community and parents usually were looking for a positive influence or role model for their children. Also, at the time of application volunteers must provide the names and addresses of two personal, one professional and one medical reference and submit a completed criminal record check. Parents must provide the name and address of one professional reference, such as a teacher or physician, on the child's application. Once the application and references have been returned, the interview process begins. For each side of the match there are two extensive personal interviews with a caseworker. The caseworker will ultimately set up and support the eventual relationship between the volunteer and child. The first of these two interviews with the volunteer or parent takes place at the BBBS office, and the second with the volunteer or child at his or her home. Family history, friendships, romantic relationships, values, interests, motivations, expectations, match preferences and self are the principle areas covered during the volunteer interview process (BBBS, 1994). The parent is asked questions similar to those of the volunteer, and is also asked to describe the family's past and present relationship with the absent parent. At this time the parent is asked to again detail the child's interests, needs and personality, and also the family's reasons for entering the BBBS program. The child's interview is a modified version of the

interviews described above with the overall goal being affirmation that the child wants a Big, understands what a Big Brother or Sister is and is not, and is prepared to be a Little Brother or Sister.

Once the interviews are complete the **selection and matching** stage begins. Based on information gleaned from applications, references, and assessment interviews, caseworkers identify a pool of potentially compatible Littles to present to the Big at a case conference. At this conference the Big hears all pertinent information about each Little and then is encouraged to spend a few days thinking about which of the Littles presented would be a suitable match. Once the Big has chosen a potential Little he or she is introduced to the parent by the caseworker who facilitates a discussion between them about their personal expectations, values and lifestyle. Again, the volunteer and parent are encouraged to take time to consider the possible match and to contact the caseworker in a few days with their final decisions. If either the parent or Big decides that the match is not suitable, the process stops and begins again with different partners. If the decision to proceed is mutual then the next step is to introduce the Big and Little and formally begin the match. Before matching, all three match participants separately attend an individual sexual abuse prevention session with a caseworker. For a volunteer the process from application to matching can take up to three months. The process for boys applying for a Big Brother is much longer since they are frequently on the program's waiting list for over a year before the application stage. Girls or boys wanting a Big Sister do

not usually wait longer than three months as there is often a surplus of Big Sisters waiting to be matched.

Once a match is established there is no regulated trial period in which the Big and Little spend time together in order to mutually decide whether to be formally matched. The match begins from the match selection process and requires both the Big and Little to commit blindly to a long-term relationship. Although this method may sound forced and artificial to an outsider, the executive director explained in a personal interview that it is the organization's belief that it is important to protect the child from possible rejection by the Big after a trial period. It is important to note that exceptions to this rule, such as a three month trial period, can be and are made at the request of the child, volunteer or parent.

After the match is established, a caseworker maintains contact with the Little and Big or parent and Big at scheduled intervals throughout the lifetime of the match; this stage is called **follow-up**. The caseworker's supportive engagement of Bigs, Littles and parents early in the match process is very important as it establishes a forum for open communication. Comfortable, honest and frequent communication is often critical during later stages of the match relationship. (Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America [BBBSA], 1992).

Conceptual Framework

In formulating the conceptual framework for this research I deliberated on those streams of literature which could be used to inform and illuminate this research topic. As I endeavored to identify these streams and build a conceptual framework around this inquiry I asked two fundamental questions:

1. What professional and/or organizational perspectives are embedded in the research question?

2. What are the key ideas or concepts supporting the research question which led me to this inquiry?

The literature in education, Child and youth care, social work, BBBS, and psychology seemed to be the professional perspectives most related to this inquiry and consequently were the source of most of the articles discussed in the literature review. The three major concepts which emerged were 1) single-parent families, 2) adult-child relationships, and 3) BBBS research. A summarized and critical presentation of the information contained within these bodies of literature served the purposes of binding and strengthening the argument for this study of relationships between Bigs and Littles. As well, the literature has informed and been informed by the results of this study.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This literature review provides a summary and critique of current research and pertinent opinion within each of the three components of the conceptual framework: single-parent families, relationships between non-family adults and children, and the BBBS research. The single-parent family section is included to identify the demographic characteristics of the specific population of families who apply to the BBBS program and some of the societal trends and values which currently impact them. The section on relationships between non-family adults and children presents a preliminary framework describing some of the attributes and outcomes of relationships between non-family adults such as volunteers or professionals and children from the perspectives of education and child and youth care. The BBBS research section presents a summary of studies done on the BBBS program and is included to highlight long-standing gaps and weaknesses in current knowledge about the program.

Single-parent Families

This section identifies the trends and values which presently impact single-parent families, pertinent Canadian statistics about families spanning the last two decades, and a demographic profile of families who typically apply to the BBBS program. The intention is to situate the inquiry in a specific human context of Canadian single-parent families and also to highlight the need for programs such as BBBS.

Major Trends and Societal Values

Competing social values and trends have a significant impact on Canadian single-parent families in the twentieth century. In contemporary North American society an increasing tolerance for non-traditional families in which the parents could be divorced, homosexual, remarried, or respite is complicated by a rejuvenated push toward traditional family values (Galston, 1991; Marciano, 1991). Staunch supporters of traditional family values insist that government encourage marriage and discourage divorce and single parenthood because they believe that only the intact two-parent family can foster children who grow up to be independent, autonomous citizens who are not a burden to society (Galston, 1991). According to one opposing perspective, “attentive love, nurturance to emotional, intellectual and moral maturity; relative stability and orderly change” are the only values children need from family and this author asserts “it is wrong to suggest that a particular *kind* of family best embodies these values for children” (Young, 1995, p. 552-p.553).

Canadian Family Statistics

Information presented in this section is based on a Statistics Canada report titled Basic Facts on Families in Canada, Past and Present which briefly points out demographic characteristics of and substantial shifts in the Canadian family population (Barr, 1993). Highlights listed at the beginning of this report announced that when comparing data about Canadian families from 1971 to 1991, it is clear that today families are smaller, the occurrence of single parent families has doubled, marriage rates have declined, divorce rates have

increased, and mothers are still the parent most likely to assume custody of children. This report also states that in 1991, 57.1% of mothers were single-parenting due to marriage break-up, while 23.4 % were widows and 19.5% had never been married (Barr, 1993). Since 1981, the highest incidence of families living at or below the low-income level has been found in the female single-parent population and this rate of incidence has been increasing over the last twenty years. Furthermore, the number of children living in single parent families has increased almost three percent over the last ten years. Finally, this report suggests that the Divorce Act of 1985, which made obtaining a divorce less difficult for Canadians, caused a significant increase in divorces granted during the mid to late eighties which is only now beginning to slow down. However, the volume of single-parent families in Canada is not likely to substantially diminish and the need for programs which serve this community of families, such as BBBS, will prevail.

The increase in divorce rates since the softening of the Divorce Act in 1985 is particularly interesting when speculating whether this event contributed to the perpetually long list of boys waiting for a Big Brother in every BBBS agency across Canada. One explanation for these long waitlists is that there are more boys living in single parent families who want a Big Brother than there are adult men with the time or inclination to be a Big Brother. In light of the potential impact of the Divorce Act, it seems appropriate to suggest that the BBBS national organization take this historic event into consideration during the process of goal setting and strategic planning.

Single-parent Families in BBBS

Based on information provided by one caseworker at BBBS of Victoria and a report published by BBBS of Ontario, this section of the literature review presents a profile of families who typically apply to the BBBS program. This caseworker estimated that over 95% of children who participate in the program live with their moms in single parent families and further stated that the greater majority of families in the program are single parent due to divorce or separation. Approximately sixty percent of the total number of matches in the BBBS program in Victoria are Big/Little Brother matches, with thirty and ten percent of the remainder consisting of Big/Little Sister matches and cross-gender (BS/LB) matches respectively.

Boys who come to the program seeking a Big Brother are always from single-parent mom-headed families and some boys living with only their dad will request and be matched to a Big Sister. Girls who come to the program seeking a Big Sister may be in single-parent mom, dad, or two parent families. When asked what moms most often specify as the reason for wanting their sons to have a Big Brother, the caseworker stated that moms felt the boys need a male influence. To explain what was meant by the concept of male influence, she added that some moms believe that there are experiences and activities they simply cannot participate in with their sons the same way a man can. Presumably, moms believe a Big Brother would partially fill the void experienced by boys who don't have a dad at home. The importance of substitute male role models for boys without at-home dads, a common theme in the BBBS literature,

is also found in the resiliency literature (Chandler, Weissberg, Cowen, & Guare, 1984; Felner, Farber, Ginter, Boike & Cowen, 1980; Gesten, Rains, Rapkin & Weissberg, Flores de Apocada, Cowen and Bowen, 1892). Big Sisters were typically sought for boys without a consistent female influence in their lives and for girls, who together with their parent(s), felt they would benefit from the time/or interests of an additional female role model.

One ambitious research project recently completed by Big Brothers of Ontario offers the first profile of the childhood and family context of children who enter the Big Brothers program (Sidoruk, 1994). In summary, this retrospective, quantitative and qualitative study found that:

Former Little Brothers appear to be typical of other children their own age. On the average, they had 1.5 siblings living at home with them, more than half (55%) reported having a lot of friends, and more than three quarters (79%) belonged to some club, organization, sports or church group (Sidoruk, 1994, p. 22).

It was further reported in this study that almost 85% of the former Little Brothers rated their relationship with their moms as either excellent or good.

Also, Sidoruk (1994) drew on the findings of Dan Offord's (1989) Ontario Child Health Study: Children at Risk, to argue that children in lone parent families, who are often receiving social assistance, are significantly more at-risk for psychiatric disorders and are five times more likely to need professional support than children from two-parent families. In his conclusion Sidoruk (1994) claimed "it is clear that on entering the Big Brothers program, the Little Brothers are at an economic disadvantage when compared to other children their own age" (p.34).

Relationships Between Children and Unrelated Adults

This aspect of the literature review is an examination of what has been written about relationships between children and adults who are not biologically related. Adults who are not biologically related to the children with whom they engage in relationships will be referred to as non-family adults. Since there is no specific research in the BBBS literature that attends to the essence of relationship between Bigs and Littles the review focused on the literature of two professions that have relationships between children and non-family adults at their core; education and child and youth care.

The Education Perspective

The educational literature refers to relationships between children and non-family adults as mentorships (McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Blechman, 1991; Von Baeyer, 1975; Yamamoto, 1988). The education profession's interest in mentorships is aimed at improving the academic success and decreasing the social maladjustment of at-risk children. Most of the studies about mentoring in schools focus on identifying the kind of volunteer needed to positively influence the at-risk child's social or academic behavior (McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Blechman, 1991; Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990; Von Baeyer, 1975). By using predominantly quantitative research designs, the results of these studies indicate that children showed higher academic and social improvement when matched to adults who were assertive, self-confident, outgoing, socially competent, and effective communicators (Blechman, 1991; McPartland et. al., 1991; Von Baeyer, 1975). The problem with these quantitative designs is that they didn't articulate

specifically how those personal characteristics manifested in the adults or how they actually contributed to increased academic and social success in the students.

These results, extracted from several studies in the education literature, indicate particular organizational and human factors which enhance mentoring outcomes in the school environment. However, these studies have very little to contribute to an understanding of the essence or content of relationships between non-family adults and children. Pre-determined research hypotheses and highly quantitative research designs which served to affirm positive assumptions about the benefits of mentoring, seem to have obstructed an opportunity to critically or honestly examine the meaning, definition and experience of mentoring relationships. It is only in the discussion paper of one American university professor that the potential magic of a mentor-mentee relationship is conceptualized (Yamamoto, 1988). Yamamoto (1988) describes this relationship as one of transcendence for the mentor and transformation for the mentee; a relationship where the child is invited to see what is yet to be seen through the mentor's absolute faith in the child.

The Child and Youth Care Perspective

True to the focus implied in its name, the child and youth care (CYC) literature about relationships between children and non-family adults focuses on the activities and elements of effectively caring for children, youth, and their families (Anglin, 1991). Even though none of the literature on adult-child relationships written by CYC professionals is empirical, it is harmonious,

comprehensive, and exceedingly relevant. The CYC literature espouses the importance of relationship, describes in detail the kind of person who is best suited to caring, lists the themes of care, and identifies the difficulties associated with genuine caring between non-family adults and children in this field. CYC professionals who work with children seem to philosophically feature the significance of the relationship between the child or youth and adult.

Unlike the education profession's attention to the benefits of mentoring relationships, the CYC profession is interested in the phenomenon of relationship in and of itself. In the field of CYC developing relationships with children, youth, and families is of primary importance and changes in the child's behavior or attitudes of people during or after the relationship are seen as a measure of the quality of that connection, rather than the expert delivery of theoretical intervention. The effective CYC professional has been described by one CYC educator as a gifted artist who intuitively weaves acquired theory and skill into a genuine presentation and expression of his or her self in relationship with a child (personal communication with Greg Saunders, May 10, 1995).

Typically the relationships that develop between CYC professionals and children are described as an ever-evolving process of sharing the road (Austin & Halpin, 1987, 1989; Fewster, 1991; Krueger, 1991). While on this shared path the caring adult travels with calm confidence and courage knowing the possibilities are endless and each person (adult and child) must make his or her own choices along the way (Fewster, 1991). Professionals in CYC believe that to be in a caring relationship with children, adults must always exercise qualities

such as compassion, love, commitment, courage, self-disclosure and creativity first and foremost, to avoid mechanistic therapeutic interventions only driven by theory (Austin et. al., 1989; Burns, 1984; Fewster, 1991; Krueger, 1991). Ideally, the CYC professional will be a strong, adaptive, available person who is highly aware of self and others, who can value the child as he or she is, and see the child's potential without imposing a specific view (Austin et. al., 1989; Burns, 1984).

After reviewing 40 years of CYC literature, Krueger (1991) distinguished aspects of the therapeutic relationship typical of CYC practice. They are as follows: coming from your center, being there, teaming up, meeting them where they're at, interacting together, counselling on the go, creating circles of care, discovering the self, and caring for one another. Based on results gleaned from a survey of experienced Child and youth care workers, Ricks (1992) came forward with a framework for caring relationships within caring professions. This rudimentary framework identified three interactive factors which distinguish caring relationships in the caring professions, such as Child and youth care, nursing and social work, from other kinds of caring relationships. Those factors are as follows: the condition of need, an attitude of concern, and intentional involvement in intervention. Ricks (1992) also suggested the following operational definition of professional caring relationships:

Caring is an intentional intervening interaction initiated out of the care-giver's and receiver's perceptions that something/someone is unwell, unsafe, at-risk or in need; the interaction is embodied in shared/mutual attitudes and feeling of concern for each other (p. 55).

The fundamental problem with the definitions and descriptions of relationship in the CYC literature is that, except one author, Krueger (1991), the suggestions are embedded in individual opinion and experience, without evidence of their validity or reliability across professionals. Although the beliefs and values expressed may resonate in the experiences of many Child and youth care workers, these ideas risk being quickly discounted as subjective and unscientific presuppositions in most critical and/or academic circles. In addition, these ideas are presented in abstract language without theoretical foundations. Consequently, it is difficult to know whether and how these ideas are applied in CYC practice.

BBBS Research

Although the BBBS program has been in operation since 1904, very little research has been produced to justify or explain its significance to the children, families and/or volunteers to which it provides a service. Empirical research on any aspect of the BBBS program did not appear in North American literature until the early eighties and only an insignificant trickle of research has continued since. To date, existing research revolves exclusively around three obvious questions which represent the following subsections: How does having a Big benefit children from single parent families?, What is the psychographic and/or demographic profile of the successful Big Brother or Sister? and finally, How can individual agencies effectively attract and retain people who have the characteristics of successful volunteers?

Benefits of BBBS

Three studies about BBBS measured the educational, psychological and interpersonal benefits of Big Brothers or Sisters to children from single parent families (Frecknall & Luks, 1992; Nelson & Valliant, 1993; Taylor, 1982). A fourth study measured improvement in mothers' social well-being as a result of having a child matched to a Big and inferred that improvement in the mother's social adjustment would lead to improvement in the child's social adjustment (Campbell & O'Neill, 1985).

Frecknall and Luks (1992) measured the effects of two independent variables, length of the match and frequency of match contacts, on seven independent variables, which included peer relationships, family relationships, self-esteem, school attendance, grades, staying out of trouble and acting responsibly. Results gleaned from this two-page questionnaire, completed by seventy-six parents of matched children, indicated that "a majority of the parents said that their children were improved in some aspect of their attitudes or behavior since enrollment in the program" (Frecknall & Luks, 1992). In addition, they reported that increased improvement in the child's attitudes or behavior was related to greater time spent in the program and frequent contact between the Parent and Big. Interestingly, an analysis of the relationship between frequency of contact between the Big and Little and reported improvement in the child's attitudes or behavior, was inconclusive.

Sixty adolescent boys ranging from age thirteen to sixteen were the subjects of a second outcome oriented study (Nelson, 1982). This study

questioned the effects of substitute male role models on the personalities of adolescent boys with absent fathers. After comparing the personality measurements of boys' from intact two-parent families, boys who were matched to a Big Brother, boys waiting for a Big Brother, and boys living in an open-custody group home, it was found that boys with a father at home or Big Brother were less depressed, assaultive, psychopathic, suspicious, and guilty than boys on the Big Brothers waitlist or boys living in group homes. It was further posited that "the fact that the "Big Brothers" are unpaid volunteers with genuine investments in boys appears to be a strong part of the program's effectiveness" (Nelson & Valliant, 1993).

A third study hypothesized that having a Big Brother would benefit both the parent and child by providing the parent with time away from the child at no cost, and the child, with consistent access to a neutral adult with whom they could talk openly about his or her parents' divorce (Taylor, 1982). However, the results extracted from this qualitative survey of twenty-five parents, Bigs, and Littles did not demonstrate that either of these benefits are significant to any of the key participants in a match relationship. Instead, Taylor (1982) found that the Big, Little and Parent most frequently cited friendship and an opportunity to try new things as the primary benefits of being matched.

The fourth study compared improvement in the general well-being and social adjustment of single moms of children who had a Big Brother, to the general well-being and social adjustment of moms whose children were on the BBBS program's waitlist for a BB (Campbell & O'Neill, 1985). Findings from this

study confirmed that the moms of children matched to a BB, "have better general well-being and improved social adjustment", than the moms of children on the waitlist (Campbell & O'Neill, 1985, p. 85).

The pivotal issue with the research in this specific area, is that although it affirms that having a Big does benefit children from single-parent homes, it has yet to identify which factor or factors within the match relationship can be attributed to those known benefits. Another problem with research looking at the benefits of BBBS, which is particularly relevant to this inquiry, is that the predominantly quantitative results presented have not been connected to the dynamic human origin; the relationship between a child and adult. A related supplemental criticism of this segment of the BBBS research is that the one study that was qualitative in design, and addressed all three matched participants, parent, Little, and Big, was diluted by poorly developed research questions.

BBBS Volunteer Profile

Several authors with an interest in BBBS have conducted research aimed toward identifying the demographic and/or psychographic profile of successful BBBS volunteers (Criterion Research Corporation [CRC], 1991; Herman, 1993; Herman & Usita, 1994; Spitz & MacKinnon, 1993; Taylor, 1984; Thorelli, 1985, 1986). The explicit intention behind these studies was to identify what kind of person makes a successful Big Brother or Sister in order to improve the efficiency and accuracy of BBBS's recruitment and screening techniques.

In 1991 the Big Brother and Big Sister Society of Edmonton and area contracted with the Criterion Research Corporation to develop a demographic

profile of volunteers within its BBBS program. Quantitative findings brought forth in this extensive empirical study revealed that the majority of BB/BS volunteers in Edmonton at that time were single, paraprofessionals, in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, who had attained some level of college education, without children, and with a relatively high annual household income (Criterion Research Corporation [CRC], 1991).

Researchers have attempted in the past to define the personality characteristics or qualities found in successful Big Brothers and Sisters (Carrilio, 1988; Klein, 1988; Styles & Morrow, 1992; Thorelli & Appel, 1978). Herman summarized the findings of these studies and stated that volunteers who are successful in the BBBS program "tend to be stable, self-assured, inter-personally skilled, trusting, conceptual, committed, flexible, and tolerant" (Herman, 1993, p. 461).

In various parts of the United States of America (USA) a psychological screening instrument known as the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 PF) is used by caseworkers to improve accuracy in the intake assessments of volunteer candidates applying to the BBBS program. While the application of the 16 PF instrument is expensive and time-consuming, its use is mandated by companies granting insurance to these BBBS agencies. Several of the studies listed above investigated whether the 16 PF test results of people known to be appropriate Big Brothers or Sisters could be used to develop a profile of desirable BBBS volunteers. Behind this effort was the idea that the profile could be applied during the early screening process of candidates to efficiently screen out people

who possessed personality characteristics such as high dominance and apprehension or poor judgment, which were believed to be indicative of an inappropriate volunteer (Herman & Usita, 1994; Lichtenberg, 1956; Spitz & MacKinnon, 1993; Taylor, 1984; Thorelli, 1985, 1986). It was further believed by these researchers that predictions, based on BBBS candidates' scores on the 16 PF, could be made about the kind of support different personality types would need from caseworkers if they were matched with a Little Brother or Sister (Herman, 1993; Herman & Usita, 1994; Spitz et. al, 1993; Thorelli, 1986).

Thorelli (1985, 1986), then a post-graduate student in the USA, took a more critical approach to examination of the predictive efficiency and validity of the 16 PF instrument. In 1985 she thoughtfully posed questions about the subtle moral and ethical dilemmas associated with employing a universal screening tool to extract the perfect volunteer from a pool of people with disparate socio-economic and personal backgrounds for an equally disparate population of families.

The dilemma posed by Thorelli (1985, 1986) was based on the awareness that in terms of match selection, children from low-income single parent homes experience more intimate and meaningful relationships when matched to volunteers from like socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. However, her research also indicated that by adulthood, children were more likely to move out of their low socio-economic status, if they had been matched to a BBBS volunteer from the dominant status quo. Appropriately, her first words at a BBBS conference on this topic were "there is no volunteer who will be all things to all

agencies” (Thorelli, 1986). Another substantive criticism of application of the 16 PF to the BBBS screening process is that it was designed as a measure of healthy personality and is not an accurate indication of pathology (Herman & Usita, 1994).

One fundamental criticism of this piece of the BBBS literature is that while it may be helpful in terms of recruitment and matching efforts, it contributes little to an applied understanding of the relationship between a Big and Little. Also, as pointed out by Thorelli (1985), an ethical compromise occurs when a formula for the perfect volunteer is developed since neither individuals nor relationships lend themselves to rigid blueprints.

BBBS Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

The identified demographic profile of BBBS volunteers in Edmonton is consistent with the findings of two distinct but similar studies of Big Sisters of Windsor Ontario (Taylor, 1984; Zanier, 1992). These studies written during the mid-eighties and early nineties explored how to attract volunteers based on their demographic profiles and then provide them with a match that maintains their initial commitment to the BBBS program.

One business administration student who conducted a study of volunteer demographics at the Windsor BS agency, recommended the agency focus its recruitment efforts on specific radio and TV stations which were popular within the current volunteer population, as well as non-volunteers of similar demographic backgrounds (Taylor, 1984). Increased volunteer recruitment and retention were the stated goal of a similar Canadian study which examined the

overall satisfaction of volunteers connected to the Windsor, Ontario Big Sisters program (Zanier, 1992).

For the purposes of this quantitative examination, Zanier (1992) grouped volunteers into three categories: women who contacted the agency but did not apply, Big Sisters who were matched but did not complete the 18-month commitment, and Big Sisters who had completed the full commitment. Results of this study indicated that those women who contacted the agency for information about volunteering but did not apply often cited either the minimum age or time requirement as their reason for not applying. Members of the group who applied but did not complete their 18-month commitment indicated that personal circumstances, and problems dealing with the Little and/or the Little's family contributed to early termination of the relationship. Big Sisters who did complete the full commitment were found to be the most satisfied with the service and support provided by the Casework staff and had the least difficulty in relationship with their Littles or the Little's family.

The level of agreement between the expectations of Bigs, Littles, and parents was the focus of another BBBS research project. In this study the homogeneity of expectations held by Bigs, Littles and parents in matches who were not having significant problems were compared to matches with significant problems. Not surprisingly, it was found that the non-problem matches were more homogenous in their expectations of the match relationship than the problem matches (Meissen & Lounsbury, 1981). The findings from this study

suggested that BBBS agencies should develop procedures to facilitate higher levels of agreement early in the orientation and application process.

Research done in this area clearly originated in a genuine desire, on the part of the BBBS organization, to maintain and increase both the volume and quality of the service it provides. However, the questions being asked were not directed at the most important informants; Littles, Bigs and parents. How else, except by asking those involved in match relationships, could the organization or its staff have even begun to understand what motivates and maintains the interest of match participants?

In contemporary Canadian society, orthodox, two-parent families are only one family lifestyle among many others (Giddens, 1992; Wilson, 1995). It follows then that the demand for programs such as BBBS, which are able to provide role models for children living in single parent families, will persist into at least the next decade. Since the driving philosophy of the BBBS movement, over its ninety year history, has been to create mutually rewarding, positive relationships between children from single parent families and non-family adults, it was astounding to discover that fundamentally important questions were overlooked. Key studies (Austin & Halpin, 1989; Blechman, 1991; Burns, 1984; Fewster, 1991; Krueger, 1991; Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990; McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Ricks, 1992; Von Baeyer, 1975) from the fields of education and Child and youth care indirectly augmented research done on the BBBS program. At present, any outsider's attempt to understand the essence of the relationship between a Big and Little remains disconcertingly subject to popular convention and professional

standpoint. Although considerable attention has been paid in the BBBS research to identifying the determinants of a successful Big Brother or Sister candidate, none of these studies speculated about the elements of a successful Big-Little relationship. To date researchers have failed to ask Bigs, Littles, parents or caseworkers about what happens in a Big-Little relationship, nor have they been asked what they believe it takes to make that connection meaningful.

In summary, while the research reviewed above was informative and interesting, it was not directly related to the topic addressed in this study. The research was predominantly American in origin and, in terms of illuminating the essence of non-family relationships between children and adults, handicapped by the use of quantitative designs. Those handicaps lie in the quantitative design's tendency to strictly examine predetermined aspects of the subjects' lifeworld out of their lived context. This form of inquiry often facilitates an understanding of the phenomenon that is almost as predetermined as the questions asked. The only body of literature which endeavored to describe the interpersonal and personal elements of such relationships, which came from the field of child and youth care, was diminished by the lack of empirical research design or scientific validation. This review of the relevant literature highlighted a substantial gap between the existing rhetoric and actual comprehension of child and non-family adult relationships. Further, this gap highlighted the need for professionals, laypeople and academics involved in human service work to find valid and coherent ways to account for the vital work being done.

CHAPTER III

Research Design

The research design used to determine the nature of relationships between Bigs and Littles was descriptive, using a phenomenological approach. The design in its entirety is presented in five distinct components which are as follows: (1) the phenomenologic method, (2) the researcher's perspective, (3) demographic information, (4) data collection and, (5) ethical considerations.

Phenomenologic Method

A phenomenological approach was used because the underpinning philosophical values and assumptions of phenomenology expressly corresponded with the objectives and questions of this inquiry as well as my personal orientation to practice and research. This phenomenological approach guided the research process through interviews, analysis and ultimately the composition of meanings, essences and themes for each participant and relationship. The following assumptions allowed me to construct a genuine understanding, which accurately conveyed the lifeworlds of particular Big and Little Brothers and Sisters. Key phenomenological assumptions were:

The aim [of phenomenology] is to remove as many demand characteristics from the research situation as possible and replace them with a relationship of empathic understanding and trust so the genuine experience will be conveyed (Osborne, 1990, p. 82).

To do phenomenology is...to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication can reveal (Van Manen, 1990, p.18).

[Qualitative research seeks] to represent reality through the eyes of participants and to be sensitive to the complexities of behavior and meaning in context (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994, p. 227).

It was my express intention in this study to explore and develop an understanding of relationships between Bigs and Littles. It was my belief that the only way to develop an understanding which was true or reflective of lived experience was to provide people with the opportunity and freedom to tell their stories without prejudgement or constraint. In accordance with the first assumption stated above, through the use of basic empathic listening and relationship building skills, I created relationships between myself and the participants where they would not feel compelled to limit their descriptions to what they perceived I wanted to hear. I did this through the use of empathy, humor, and genuineness. I also explicitly stated my non-directive intentions to participants during their initial and subsequent orientations to the study.

The second assumption stated above speaks to my awareness that, regardless of the rigor and regard with which I approached and conducted this study, some aspects of the 'magic' between Bigs and Littles would always allude description. This assumption exemplified two beliefs I held and brought to this research. The first, as explained to me at a lecture on research methodology and methods, was "the complete analysis isn't" (personal communication with Lorene Shields, February, 15, 1995). In other words, despite how thorough I was in my investigation of relationships between Bigs and Littles, there will always be questions unasked and answers overlooked. This is true simply because I cannot as an outsider fully comprehend what I have not experienced firsthand.

The second related belief was that there is no singular recipe or description of the 'magic' Big/Little relationship. This second belief pertained to the limitations of verbal or written accounts when used to recount or recover the spirit of something in the past. This belief also suggested that lived experience is always far richer than any description can capture.

The third assumption embodied what I hold as the core of phenomenological methodology; an emphasis on understanding the lived experience of a phenomenon, and overtly situating any understanding that ensued in the context from which it originated. With this intention in mind I interviewed Bigs and Littles; the only people I felt who could legitimately speak to the relationship between a Big and Little. Earlier I provided a detailed description of the BBBS organization in terms of its mission statement, and more importantly, I described the common motivations of children, adults and parents who apply to the BBBS program (see pages 6-8 and 15-24 respectively). In a further attempt to illuminate the full context of this inquiry I made explicit my own and others preconceptions about the Big-Little relationship (see pages 37-39).

I believe the phenomenological assumptions illustrated above have facilitated a research endeavour where the generation of knowledge was shared by both researcher and participants and can be used to develop an accurate field based understanding of the lived experience of the Big-Little relationship. Furthermore, having used a phenomenological approach, the understanding generated was enhanced because of the use of methods which paralleled their human interactions. Consequently, the understanding generated was not

seriously impaired by methods of data collection, analysis or discussion that might dilute or alter the participants' descriptions of the relationship.

After reviewing various other methodological positions within the qualitative paradigm, such as Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory (1990) and the case study approach (Stake, 1994), I felt phenomenology provided the most appropriate foundation for this study. This choice was based on my understanding that the "aim of [phenomenological research] is to understand a phenomenon by allowing the data to speak for themselves, and by attempting to put aside one's preconceptions as best as one can" (Osborne, 1990, p.81).

Researcher's Perspective

Most qualitative researchers are as concerned with the research process as with the final outcome and are often already highly sensitive to, if not familiar with, the phenomenon they chose to study (Becker, 1986). For myself, this sense of attending to two purposes at once extended further to include my admittedly fused personal and professional interests. As I began this study of relationship I was conscious of the mixture of personal and professional beliefs and assumptions I held not only about Big and Little relationships, but also relationships in general, research, and child and youth care. These beliefs stemmed from my own cross-validation; a composite of my experiences as a friend, woman, student, counsellor, retired BBBS caseworker, and researcher. Since making the researcher's perspective explicit is of paramount importance in qualitative research, what follows is my attempt to clearly state mine (Colaizzi, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

One belief that brought me into this study was that people who have experienced at least one good relationship in their lifetime are more likely to feel good about themselves than those people without such a relationship. When I refer to a 'good' relationship I am suggesting one where both people have opportunities to experience themselves and each other in ways which are mutually empowering, challenging, self-affirming, and growth-enhancing. When I state that people who have had the benefit of a good relationship will feel 'good' about themselves, I mean to say that they will have a sense of self-worth, healthy self-esteem, and are likely to possess an able rather than powerless orientation to their lives and other people. I hold several supplementary beliefs related to this primary belief about people and relationships. I believe this kind of influential relationship may be short or long term, familial or not, spontaneous or arranged, formal or informal, and may consist of similar or dissimilar people in terms of age, socio-economic background, education, sex, sexual orientation or race. I hold the existence of mutual benefit of paramount importance in relationship. Another belief that influenced me in this work was that research is only appropriate if it is respectful of and useful to the culture it examines.

These beliefs have followed me through many relationships (some as described above, others not) and guided me to an education in child and youth care where I believe relationship was at the heart of my learning and skill development. These beliefs led me to work at BBBS, where the sole purpose of the work is to initiate and support mutually rewarding relationships between children and adults and to this research in the area of relationship. All of these

beliefs were expressed in my research question and stood behind it as my personal orientation to this study.

One of the assumptions I made in doing this study was that it would be useful for outsiders such as caseworkers, parents, administrators and boards of directors to understand what the relationship between Bigs and Littles means to Bigs and Littles. Another assumption I made, which was confirmed in my search of BBBS and related literature, was that the essence of relationship, between non-family adults and children, had not been specifically addressed by past researchers and was therefore not well understood. I also assumed the findings of this study would be a source of interest, if not illumination, for most people involved in the helping services, whether as consumers or service providers.

I acknowledge the method I used to develop this preliminary understanding of the Big-Little relationship was limited by small sample size. However, I would suggest that to ask six Bigs and Littles about their relationships, even within the context of this researcher's perspective, was better than to have continued to authoritatively speak of the phenomenon of Big-Little relationships without having asked the question at all.

Demographic Information

Several researchers espouse the benefits of a researcher's familiarity with the phenomenon and culture under study as well as his/her access to the research setting (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Henning-Stout, 1994; Osborne, 1990; Osborne, 1994). Over the three years that I worked in this particular BBBS office I developed a reputation as a responsive and effective caseworker with my

colleagues, the executive director and many of the volunteers, parents, children and board members involved with this program. With this in mind I chose the local BBBS agency to pursue my interest in relationships between children and non-family adults. Before I began this study I spoke with the executive director of BBBS in Victoria. I asked for her permission to rely on BBBS as my sampling population and also for permission to refer to the BBBS staff for their perspective and feedback during the research process (see Appendix A for a copy of her letter of permission).

Population

The BBBS program at 103-3347 Oak Street, in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada was the source of participants invited to participate in this study. BBBS is a non-profit social service agency that pairs adult volunteers with children from predominantly single parent families, in an effort to provide children with friendship, guidance and support. This particular BBBS agency operates with a staff of five who recruit, train, match and follow approximately two hundred and fifty pairs of Bigs and Littles for the duration of their relationships, which can range from a few months to several years. These Bigs and Littles may live anywhere within the Capital Regional District (CRD) and come from various socio-economic and educational backgrounds. As described earlier, children in the BBBS program range from age seven to nineteen and are typically from single parent, mother-headed families. Adults who volunteer to be Big Brothers or Sisters in the Victoria program range from age nineteen to eighty and often are without children of their own or have adult children.

Sample

The sample for this study was voluntary and consisted of three matches. Six people were interviewed; three Bigs and three Littles. The sample was select and small as my intent was not to use the findings of this study to make declarations about Big-Little relationships in general, but rather to accurately articulate the unique and shared experiences of these particular individuals and their matches.

My initial step in identifying participants was to meet with the BBBS casework staff. During this meeting caseworkers received a summarized version of the study which outlined my research questions, aims and objectives, and method (see Appendix B for sample summary). I reviewed this summary with the caseworkers and invited them to comment and/or ask questions. Overall they were comfortable with my plan but objected to my original focus on only Big and Little Brother matches. They felt that since BBBS in Victoria also supports Big and Little Sister matches as well as cross-gender matches my study must reflect the full scope of their work. Consequently, I altered my original plan and developed a study that included each type of match.

Due to this organization's policies around confidentiality and my status as an outsider, I asked the casework staff to identify potential participants for the study. At this meeting caseworkers were provided with a guide designed to help them in the process of identifying potential participants for the study (see Appendix C for sample selection guide). It was explained to the caseworkers that the most important criteria for selection of participants was that they (the Big and

Little) defined themselves as a 'good' match. At this point it was not relevant what the Big or Little held as the criteria for their 'good' match but rather that they believed their relationship was a 'good' one. Since this involvement of the casework staff in the initial identification of participants, allowed the caseworkers' perspectives to influence selection of participants they were asked to individually document their process in identifying participants. They were also asked to articulate what they believed made a 'good' match (see Appendix D for sample letter). These descriptions and definitions from the casework staff were handed to the agency's executive director and held until the interviews and data analysis were completed. This information has been incorporated into the discussion section to further illuminate the research context (page 88).

After a pool of matches was identified, I contacted the Bigs over the phone to introduce myself. I briefly described my study and invited them to an orientation where the study was described in more detail. Once I had three Bigs who were interested in learning more about participation in the study, I contacted the parents of their Littles to introduce myself and the study and explore their interest, as well as what they perceive to be their children's interest. Following this initial contact I invited the group of potential participants and caseworkers to an information session at the BBBS office where I described the study, responded to any questions or concerns, and finally I asked the Bigs, Littles and parents who were willing to be in the study to sign and return to me a letter of consent (see Appendix E for sample letter).

Setting

Participants in the study had the option of being interviewed in the BBBS office or in their homes. Since it is part of the BBBS screening, interviewing and matching process to meet with caseworkers both in the BBBS office and in the homes of Bigs and Littles either of these settings would have been appropriate. These options were made available to enable the participants to choose the setting in which they were likely to feel most comfortable. All the participants, with the exception of one Little Sister, chose to be interviewed at the BBBS office.

Data Collection

With phenomenology as the framework for this study of lived experience, semi-structured interviews provided the vehicle for hearing and seeing their experience. According to Osborne (1994) the human sciences often describe phenomena using the phenomenological method. The phenomenological method, he suggested, is typically a gathering of introspective reports of participants' personal experience of the phenomena under study, generated through verbal interviews or written accounts. To get these introspective reports, research interviews were used because they: 1) centered on the interviewee's life-world; 2) sought to understand the meaning of the phenomenon; 3) were qualitative; 4) descriptive; 5) specific; 6) presuppositionless; 7) focused on certain themes; 8) open to ambiguities; 9) change; 10) depended on the sensitivity of the interviewer; 11) were an interpersonal interaction, and; 12) may have been a positive experience (Kvale, 1983, p.174).

The Interview Method

The following section introduces the key tenets of the interview method as they relate to phenomenological research, outline data collection, recording and analysis techniques, and discusses issues surrounding the reliability and validity of interviews from a phenomenological perspective. In this study I addressed the stated research objectives and research questions through qualitative semi-structured, in-person, individual interviews between myself and three Bigs and also three Littles. In an attempt to link my research goals and questions directly to the interview process, I created a thematic guide which I was mindful of, though not devoted to, during the interview process. This guide was based on themes I encountered in my practice at BBBS and was as follows:

Individual realm

Describe themselves and any internal and/or external factors which lead to their involvement with the BBBS program.

Developmental realm

Illustrate the history and evolution of the match relationship over time.

Characteristic realm

Seek out aspects of the match relationship which make it unique in terms of roles, responsibilities and activities.

Meaning realm

Explore the personal impact and/or meaning of the match relationship.

Altogether these themes held me to the research question and objectives and oriented me to the interview process in “such a strong manner that [I did not] get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere” (Van Manen, 1992, p.67). To explore the meaning realm during interviews, for example, I often asked Bigs or Littles to tell me about the events or moments that

appeared significant, or I asked, what was really important or special to you about that?

I chose this style of interview for two fundamental reasons. The first of those reasons was my impression that data collected as part of a qualitative study was typically generated from some form of participant-researcher interview (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Devault, 1990; Kvale, 1983; Patton, 1980; Sandelowski, 1986; Spradley, 1979). The second reason was my belief that the integrity of participants' accounts of their experience as Bigs and Littles, hinged on my ability to create a relational atmosphere where participants felt their stories were safe, respected and most importantly heard.

The following quotes represent key tenets of the interview method which served as guiding principles for me during the interview process:

The task of the interviewer is to focus upon, or guide towards, certain themes, but not to guide the interviewee towards certain opinions about these themes (Kvale, 1983, p.176).

[I]t is imperative to stay as close to experience as lived...As we ask what an experience is like, it may be helpful to be very concrete...[and] explore the whole experience to the fullest (Van Manen, 1992, p. 67).

[There must be] a willingness on the part of the consultee and consultant to suspend absolute agendas in order to "listen" to the nuance of the...situation (Henning-Stout, 1994, p. 11).

Relative to the tenets listed above, I developed a method of interviewing which I believed was flexible, respectful, resonant, and specific. To generate data that was thematically focused and yet remained close to lived experience, I chose to approach the participant interviews with themes, but not questions, in

mind. In my effort to suspend agendas (mine and others) I clearly outlined my beliefs and assumptions prior to this study and asked the BBBS staff to do the same. During the research process I expected that my beliefs and values would be challenged. To ensure that my perspective did not inadvertently color my interview style or presence, I kept a journal of my personal reflections and responses during the interview process. This journal was a personal tool which I used to spontaneously express, observe and 'bracket' my agendas during data collection and analysis.

It was my intent throughout the interview process to create a responsive relationship between myself and the participants as described by Fontana and Frey (1994) who state "because the goal of unstructured interviewing is *understanding*, it [is] ... paramount for the researcher to establish rapport" (p.367). I applied the skills that I possess as a counsellor and Child and youth care worker, such as unconditional positive regard, genuineness and empathy, and created an atmosphere of trust and respect between myself and the participants. I encouraged participants to describe their experiences as Bigs and Littles freely and in detail. To this end, I asked predominantly open-ended questions and invited participants to share specific stories which served to enrich general statements made about their relationships.

Data Recording

During each interview the participant's verbal reports of their experiences as Bigs and Littles were recorded on audio tape. The interview tapes were copied and the original tapes and copied versions were stored in separate secure

locations to protect the privacy of research participants. Once the audio tapes were transcribed there were both hard and soft copies of the data which were also kept in secure and separate locations. At the end of the research project all copies of these tapes were returned to the participants and the transcribed material was destroyed.

Data Analysis

Similar to the challenges I faced in selecting interviews as my data collection method, data analysis in phenomenological research was also without an orthodoxy (Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990, 1994). However, Osborne (1990, 1994) provided a structured, albeit underdeveloped, approach to data analysis for beginning phenomenological researchers. This structured approach to data analysis was broken into two stages: the first constituted a within persons or participants analysis and the second an across persons analysis. In the first stage there were three steps: 1) identify the themes within the protocol for each participant; 2) sort those themes into thematic clusters, and; 3) sort the clusters into hierarchical clusters, similar to rational factor analysis. In the second stage the researcher cut across the participants' protocols, abstracted the shared themes and formed a structure of the phenomenon. This final structure was then "synthesized into a description which captured the essence (meaning) of the phenomenon" (Osborne, 1994, p. 172). Osborne's (1990, 1994) framework for data analysis corresponded with what Kvale (1983) called the fourth phase of interpretation. In this fourth phase Kvale (1983) described three levels of analysis which included: 1) the interviewer's attempts to condense and formulate what the

interviewee understood as the meaning of his/her experience; 2) the interviewer's attempts to get at the spirit of what was said by reading between the lines, and; 3) the interviewer *may* [italics added] draw on more theoretical interpretations.

The method of data analysis I used in this study was a composite of the strategies described by Osborne (1990, 1994) and Kvale (1983). The stages of analysis which I followed when analysing this data were:

Stage 1. Identify and extract the salient information within each participant's interview.

Stage 2. Sort information provided into meaningful phrases for each participant.

Stage 3. Identify match essences, reflected by similarities in the meaningful phrases of each Little and Big, within a match.

Stage 4. Identify themes, reflected by similarities and differences in the meaningful phrases of all Littles interviewed.

Stage 5. Identify themes, reflected by similarities and differences in the meaningful phrases of all Bigs interviewed.

Stage 6. Identify universal themes, reflected by similarities and differences in the meaningful phrases of all Littles and Bigs interviewed.

Methodological Issues

According to Kvale (1983) "[t]he interview has often been denied scientific status" (p.189) and this perspective seems to persist amongst contemporary researchers (Anderson, 1994; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Osborne, 1990,1994). Acknowledging the need for research which is reliable, Osborne (1990) argued that "although there may be several interpretive perspectives on the same phenomenon, sameness (reliability) can arise out of the inconsistency, variability and relativity of human perception" and that "stable meaning [which is the goal of

phenomenological research] can transcend variable facts” (p. 87). Osborne (1990, 1994) clearly articulated a strategy for assessing validity in qualitative research which was shared by various other researchers (Anderson, 1989; Bullington & Karlsson, 1984; Henning-Stout, 1994; Kvale, 1983; Van Manen, 1992). He broke this strategy into four components as follows: 1) bracketing of the researcher’s orientation to the phenomenon; 2) checking with the participants for goodness of fit during data analysis; 3) producing a convincing argument in the analysis, incorporating both the participants voices and scientific rhetoric, and 4) checking the degree to which the final interpretation resonates with people not in the study who have experienced the phenomenon (1990, pp. 87-88).

In response to these complicating factors and issues I used Osborne’s (1990) strategy to assess the validity of the meanings, essences and themes I identified. The five steps I followed to ensure the validity of my analysis were as follows:

Step 1. I clearly identified myself and those beliefs and assumptions I held which impacted my orientation to this research process (see pages 45-48).

Step 2. I continued to express my personal responses to this research endeavour, in the form of a written journal, kept during the data collection and analysis phases of the research process.

Step 3. I documented and adhered to a specific process of data collection and analysis to ensure that my process could be understood by an outside reader.

Step 4. In the presentation of findings I used the narrative accounts of participants to support my analysis and in the discussion I added other academic literature for validation.

Step 5. I reported my findings back to the participants, BBBS staff members, and Bigs and Littles not in the study, to ensure “goodness of fit”.

Ethical Considerations

“Because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them” (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p.372).

Throughout this study I focused on the issues of informed consent and the interview as a data collection method. Fontana and Frey (1994) posited that traditionally, ethical considerations have revolved around three areas of concern: informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm. All of these ethical considerations I brought to the beginning of my study and were held at the forefront of all of my research strategies.

The popular issues of informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm I addressed throughout the study. These issues first appeared in my research proposal and later in my application to the Human Subjects Committee at UVIC. I also obtained written permission from the executive director of BBBS, to conduct my study within her program and to involve her staff in the validation of my findings (see Appendix A for copy of permission). Bigs, Littles and parents were invited to an information session where I described my research intentions and their involvement, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Also, all participants (including parents or guardians) were asked to sign a letter of consent, which was explained to them at the information meeting. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the external Bigs as well as the BBBS staff I have not used their names. The external Bigs are referred to as Big A, B, or C and the staff are referred to by their job titles, such as executive director, caseworker or secretary.

Overall, I believe that the methodology and method I selected effectively served to protect the privacy and rights of participants and those who were referred to for validation, at the same time that they provided a vehicle for the voice of peoples' unique experiences to be formally introduced to the discussion of BBBS practice and policy.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This section presents the findings of six interviews with Big and Little Brothers and Sisters conducted during the month of May, 1996. As outlined in the methods section of this paper, three separate matches were interviewed, one Little Brother/Big Brother, one Big Sister/Little Sister and last, one Big Sister/Little Brother. These matches are referred to as Match #1, Match #2, and Match #3 or LB #1 and BB #1, LS #1 and BS #1, and LB #2 and BS #2.

First each match is briefly introduced and following this introduction are synopses of each Little's and Big's interview. At the individual level key meaningful phrases are identified. These phrases serve to capture the meanings inherent in each Little and Big's description of his or her experience in the match. At the match level those key phrases are further contemplated to support the identification of match essences¹. Following the match essences there is a presentation of themes within groups of first Littles and then Bigs. Finally universal themes, which cut across all participants, are identified and discussed.

Match # 1

This match consists of a Big and Little Brother. They have been matched for just over three years and spend most of their time together during the winter ski season, as LB #1 is quite busy with academic pursuits during the school year and BB #1 is away fighting forest fires during the summer. LB #1 is an only child

¹ Essence indicates "the most important and distinctive feature of something, which determines its identity" Makins, M. (Ed.). (1994). *Collins compact English dictionary* (New Edition). Great Britain: HarperCollins Publishing).

and lives with his mother, his father is not involved in his life. Their contact is relatively sporadic with BB #1 initiating the majority of phone calls and visits, although according to BB #1, LB #1 has significantly increased taking the initiative since the beginning of their match. They spend time watching movies, skiing and just hanging out. At the beginning of their match they attended most BBBS sponsored events, but now meet independently. BB #1's girlfriend is quite involved in the match relationship and often will substitute as Big for LB #1 if there is a BBBS's event that LB #1 wants to attend, such as the annual camp-out, and BB #1 is unavailable. In the words of LB #1, "she's not as busy as BB #1 usually... [doing stuff with her instead is a] pretty good idea."

Synopsis Little Brother #1

At the time that I did LB #1's interview, BB #1 had just left town for a summer of firefighting and he and LB #1 had not been able to meet to say goodbye. LB was visibly and audibly discouraged by this and said that "we've kind of drifted a bit... [w]e haven't been seeing as much of each other." I believe his disappointment was palpable during his interview with me.

According to this LB his mother made the decision for him to get a BB. He described this process as "a little scary...and that he was a little paranoid...[T]his guy just walks in...I was thinking well he's probably going to kill me." Later in the interview LB #1 elaborated on the development of the relationship over their three years together and said that at the beginning he tried to be very polite, funny and nice so that his BB would like him. Now he isn't so focused on making his BB like him and sees them as "close friends who have really gotten to know each other."

As with most of the interviewees, LB #1 was clear that his BB was a friend.

For this LB the friendship of his BB was a significant factor in their relationship.

As LB #1 described his friendship with BB #1 he said he's:

somebody to see every now and then. I think of him as a close friend. Like a really, really close friend. Like he's related to me or something. I almost think of him as a Dad.

Concurrent with the title of "really close friend" also came the roles of confidante and mentor. To LB #1, BB #1 was someone with whom he shared things about himself that he did not share with anyone else. LB #1 said "if you want to talk to someone, he's like a really good friend...[Y]ou're telling him stuff even your parent/mother doesn't know." The mentoring aspect of this friendship surfaces as LB #1 explains "he's older than me and he helps me when I need help... [I]f I have to ask something he'll probably know it."

This LB spoke at length about how BB #1 was not really like a brother but like family. He described him as more like a cousin or Dad as BBs "are not always around when you need 'em or want 'em" ... whereas true brothers "are everywhere... you're walking around in your living room and your brother is right there." For this LB the most important thing about having a BB is "if I get to see him I'm not lonely or bored or anything." Finally this LB told me that "if your BB is just right for you [which means that] they have the same interests, "the same way ... it's a lot of fun."

Meaningful Phrases-Little Brother #1

After many examinations of the information LB #1 shared during his interview several meaningful phrases emerged. LB #1 spoke frequently of

Getting to Know BB, Being Really Close Friends, Not Being Lonely or Bored, and Finding Common Interests. For LB #1 getting to know his BB pertained to the changes and time spent in the match from its inception through to the present. As a result of this time spent getting to know each other, LB #1 said they were friends who were very close. Another important aspect of the friendship for LB #1 was his belief that BB #1 is someone he can talk to and who will know how to help him when he needs help. LB #1 attributed the absence of loneliness and boredom in his life to the amount of contact he has with his BB. Finally, this LB felt it is beneficial to the match if the Big and Little have the same interests or personalities.

Synopsis Big Brother #1

This interview was my first and took place in the BBBS office. At the time that we met BB #1 was approximately one week shy of leaving town for the summer and quite involved in final preparations for this work. He too mentioned somewhat resignedly that he had not seen his LB much lately and had intended to spend some time with him before he left.

This BB spoke of three factors motivating him to be a BB. The first was that “when I was younger I always thought it would be neat to have a BB.” The second factor was even though he is a biological BB “he and I aren’t very close.” The third factor which led BB #1 to join the BBBS program was “most of them are single parents and I grew up most of the time, until I had my stepdad, single... my mom [was] single for the younger part of my life.” BB #1 remembers at the beginning of his match with LB #1 that he was “worried about him being super

entertained” but that he has since “figured out not to try to be someone else for him [but rather to] just be yourself.” For BB #1 the first year was really tough. He said after a while your guard comes down but at the beginning, “meeting someone new, you gotta [sic] feel out their personality and stuff like that you don’t want to be [gestures forward with one hand] come at them.”

This BB says “I think brother is a weird term for it because it’s more like a friend...[since] I’ve never spent Christmas with him or [gone] to family gatherings.” The way this BB #1 describes his match with LB #1 friendship seemed to be a welcome but unanticipated aspect of Big Brothering. In his words “I didn’t really know what to expect when I came in and I feel you get a friend out of it and someone...I’ll probably see him for the rest of my life.”

One aspect of the match that was particularly important to BB #1, even at the outset, was personal benefit. As he recalled his intention was “just to have something in his life and have something in mine that we both can remember and get something out of.” According to this BB the ‘something to remember’ which each of them will extract from their relationship is different depending on who’s life is considered.

Knowing that his LB looks up to him is a big part of the benefit for this BB.

As he explains:

it’s nice to know you do count and that you have an impact in his life [i]t makes you feel good and needed that what you do does reflect in others and you are I guess important...it’s neat when someone says that and you think well someone wants to be like me.

Another way BB #1 benefits from this relationship comes in the form of a lesson which he applies to his life , “not to take life too seriously.” BB #1 explains that seeing his LB come to meet him all messy and not giving a damn:

is just great...I don't care, he doesn't care and it helps me in my own life...the way I view things now and live each day as it is to the fullest.

BB #1 describes himself as someone who puts a lot of stress on himself and being with his LB reminds him of the “who cares” mentality of his childhood and this helps him with his life in general. The one big thing LB #1 does is push BB #1 to remember that if “you're too serious you're just not going to enjoy life.”

BB #1 says what he believes his LB gets out of the match is a mentor, someone:

who is there, to talk to, hang out with, look up to, do things with, someone who has a real interest in what he has to say and can show [him] morals; what's good what's not.

One experience that illustrates that idea of ‘being there to talk’ was a time when LB #1 came to him with a problem he was having at school. What was significant about this experience for BB #1 was that “he came to me...he wanted to talk about it...[and] he trusted and believed in me.” BB #1 also explained, another way that LB #1 “sort of looks up to [him]...[is] with firefighting, he totally thinks well maybe that's what he wants to do.”

Meaningful Phrases Big Brother #1

The meaningful phrases which I have identified for BB #1 after examining his interview data are as follows: **Becoming Ourselves, Being A Friend He Can Talk To, Having His Friendship Helps Me Be Less Serious, He Reminds Me**

of Myself. Becoming ourselves represents the changes BB #1 noted in his match over its three year duration; as time passed there was less 'work' and planning and the match became more spontaneous and natural. BB #1 also saw himself as a friend his LB could talk to and this encompassed BB #1's perception of himself as a both role model and mentor. He pointed out that in their relationship he not only became a friend but gained a friend. BB #1 stated he personally benefited from the relationship with LB #1 as it helped him to take life less seriously and to live life to the fullest. During the interview BB #1 also reflected on his development through childhood and adolescence and used these experiences to relate to and identify with the behavior and experiences of his LB.

Match Essence

Match #1 is an evolving and dynamic relationship between an adolescent boy and young man. Over three years as Big and Little Brothers they have had many opportunities to both celebrate and brood over their strengths and struggles as a match. Together, through time, this relationship has provided each of them with a source of friendship, personal gain and relatedness.

As in all the matches the passage of time was an essential aspect of their eventual freedom in the relationship. In time LB #1 was able to put aside his initial "paranoia" and fear. LB #1 recalled being quite uncertain and hesitant with BB #1 at the beginning of their match, however, in the present he no longer feels compelled to perform for or please BB #1. Slowly, BB #1 was able to shed his similar need to impress and entertain and instead presented his LB with a genuine picture of who he is and what he has to offer. Through time and thus the

accumulation of experiences with his LB he is now confident and trusting of himself in the role of adult role model and friend to a youth.

For this Big and Little, friendship was and is the essence of the match. Both the Big and Little in this match define themselves as close and lifetime friends. Under the umbrella of their friendship lie many personal benefits. For LB #1, BB #1 is someone he can and does go to for help with things he struggles with in his personal life. LB #1 sees BB #1 as someone who can help him and does. Concurrently, BB #1 sees himself as someone his LB can come to for help and also someone he can look up to. Through his friendship with LB #1, BB #1 has an opportunity to be reminded not to take his life too seriously. Spending time with his LB provides him with a natural source of stress reduction.

A significant part of the essence of Match #1 is similar childhood experiences and perhaps personalities. Although BB #1 was outgoing as a child, he said he can relate to some of LB #1's socially awkward childhood and adolescent experiences. In fact, he confers with these memories as he interacts and identifies with his LB. LB #1 felt it helps their match that they have "the same way".

The only outstanding difference in Match #1 was initiative. BB #1 came to this relationship unguided and voluntarily, whereas LB #1 came willingly but uninformed, at the urging of his mother. This imbalance continues in the relationship as the Big stated on initiating and maintaining contact; "I do most of it." Nevertheless, as BB #1 put it, "I can relate to him [not calling]...he [LB] might be thinking, I don't know what to do with this guy [BB]...he's [LB] still a child."

Match #2

This match consists of a Big and Little Sister. They were matched on November 18, 1994 and usually see each other on weekends, either weekly or bi-weekly, depending on their interest and availability. This Big and Little spend their time either attending public events around Victoria, such as parades and fairs, or doing arts and crafts at BS's house. Typically, BS #1 will suggest an activity for them to do together and LS #1 either approves or disapproves. BS #1 most often is the one to initiate outings by phone call although she is very pleased to note that LS #1 has just begun to call her. This match attends some BBBS sponsored events but not many and are quite content to meet on their own. LS #1 lives with her mother and three older brothers and sees her father regularly. There is an open and flexible match with LS #1's brothers or mother sometimes accompanying them on outings.

Synopsis Little Sister #1

I interviewed LS #1 just before dinnertime on a school night, close to the end of the school year. When I arrived her mother had not yet come home from work as we had expected. Nevertheless we decided to begin the interview. LS #1 was enthusiastic and eager to share her experience of being a Little Sister. She was talkative, open and very focused. The following is a synopsis of the highlights of our interview which took just over one hour.

According to LS #1 one day her mom just came home from work and told her that she'd signed herself and one of her brothers up with the BBBS program. The reason that LS #1's mother gave her for doing this was that "she doesn't

have a lot of time to bring me to things and do crafts....because she works and has a lot of things to do." LS #1 remembers feeling "excited because I would be doing a lot of things each week that I wouldn't usually get to do."

Their relationship has become more natural over time. As LS #1 explained at the beginning "I wouldn't feel that comfortable, like I would sort of thank-you and please a lot and now...I only say that if she like bought me something or drove me somewhere, I feel more comfortable." This comfortable feeling is quite a different feeling than she had when she first met BS #1 and found that "she was totally different than the person that I thought of." LS #1 stated "I know her dog more and I know what kinds of things that she [BS] likes to do...[I know] things that would fit her house like not to take your shoes off and she knows that sometimes [LS's brother] like to come along...it's more comfortable" Interestingly, according to LS #1 this does not imply that the relationship has grown more intimate as LS #1 explains, "I usually just tell her about school and you don't usually just talk about things that we're feeling, we just talk about things at school and her work."

The idea, that BS #1 enables LS #1 to do things she wouldn't otherwise get to do, was clearly the highlight of the relationship for her. For example LS #1 said, "she [BS #1] usually finds things that I mean I wouldn't find but I'd really enjoy...I mean I'd love to go to that!" Another important aspect of the match for LS is that BS #1 knows how to do a lot of crafts that LS #1 doesn't know how to do but is very interested in doing. LS #1 explained that "BS well she gives me a chance to do that [crafts] cause she has all the supplies...and she knows what to

do.” LS #1 enjoys the fact that she “can give [the crafts] to either [her] mom or dad...as a present and say I made this and I feel better than if I bought it.”

Although LS #1 talked a great deal of the things she enjoys which BS #1 enables her to do, she also explained that sometimes they have differing needs in the relationship. According to LS #1, BS #1 likes “to do stuff as much as we can and I’m just when we feel like it...[also] I don’t like going out to special events as much as she does...I like doing crafts and just going to the fairs.” LS #1 finds it “pretty easy” to tell her BS #1 she doesn’t want to do something because “I mean I know her pretty well and she’s not like mad or sad when I say it.” In spite of this ease LS #1 says usually she’ll say yes to anything because “when we go it is exciting...[and if] it’s not well I just try to find something or do something that I think will just kind of be more exciting”

Another dimension of their relationship noted by this LS was that her BS is the one who initiates contact. LS #1 said “I just leave it up to her to find something [to do], sometimes I kind of feel like I’m not doing a lot because she always finds them and I hardly find anything...but I don’t know what we’re supposed to do.”

LS #1 described BS #1 as someone who is:

fun to be with and nice [and who] is supposed to take me out to a lot of things, that will find a lot of stuff, and she’ll be really excited and she’ll try to make it really exciting and she won’t make it seem boring.

She said her BS is “not my big sister biologically but she is just as friendly.” LS #1 explained that “ BS and I we are friends and we do things together and I don’t

know why BBBS are still sending us newsletters...I mean we could you know quit and still be friends.” LS #1 says as the Little it is her responsibility to ensure that she doesn’t “schedule things when [she’s] supposed to go somewhere [withBS], ...to be considerate and to not expect more...just be happy with what she’s doing.”

Meaningful Phrases Little Sister #1

Following several examinations of this LS’s interview, several meaningful phrases were identified. Although these phrases are not framed in the exact words of LS #1 they are, according to her, an accurate reflection of the information she shared during her interview. These four meaningful phrases are:

My Mom is Too Busy, Now that We Know What to Expect We’re Comfortable, I Do New and Different Things, My BS is Interested and Available.

The meaning in the first phrase is obvious, according to LS #1 her mother doesn’t have a lot of time for her recreational interests. This was the reason she was given by her mother for having a BS and the reason she accepted the relationship. When LS #1 speaks of this reality she is open and matter-of-fact. She recognizes that her mother works full-time and has other responsibilities and interests and that since her father lives out of town he also is not able to enjoy these types of interests with her.

The second meaningful phrase speaks to how the relationship feels different to LS #1 now, than it felt when they first met. LS #1 explained that after a year spent together they know each other better and are more comfortable with

each other. She is able to be relaxed with her BS and not be focused on being polite or anticipating her BS's expectations. She has been able to include important people in her life on their outings, such as her brothers and mother, and this was a source of comfort to her. She also has a better grasp on who her BS is as a person and defines her by things such as her work as a teacher, her dog, her likes, and also her friends. This accumulation of facts about BS all served to build LS #1's comfort level with their relationship. LS is also secure in the knowledge that her BS knows her routine, in terms of school events, schedules, family and friends.

The final two phrases are interdependent; one represents the opportunity and the other the means. The most meaningful aspect of the match for LS #1 is what (the activities) she gets to do with BS #1. BS #1 provides her with the how and who (the means) to do those things she enjoys. In the mind of LS #1, her BS provides her with an ongoing source of recreational knowledge, opportunity, and learning that without BS #1 she wouldn't have. Further, it is not only that by having a BS she gets to do new things but further that she does them with BS #1, someone with time, similar interests and enthusiasm. For example, according to LS #1 her BS has the materials and experience to show her how to do new and exciting crafts. BS #1 also knows of exciting but relatively unheard of events happening in Victoria. BS #1 shares these interests with LS #1 who greatly enjoys them and without BS #1's invitations, wouldn't even know of their existence. It is important to note that in spite of the previous two meaningful phrases, LS #1 did identify some points of dissimilar needs and interest. LS #1's

perception is that BS #1 would see her whenever she could, whereas LS #1 would like to see her BS only when she feels like it. Further to this theme, LS #1 says BS #1 prefers attending shows or events around town, whereas she would rather do crafts and attend only certain public events such as fairs.

Synopsis Big Sister #1

This interview took place with BS #1 shortly after I interviewed her LS. BS #1 arrived at the BBBS office early and eager to begin her interview. She was curious about how my interview with her LS had gone and I told her it went well.

This BS had several reasons for becoming a BS. The first, as she put it, was "it was something that I had thought about for a long time because when I was in about grade seven I knew a little brother and I was feeling a little bored with life so I thought hey that's something I'd like to do." Another factor in the decision was that although she works as an elementary school teacher she is not able in that role to develop "the relationship [she] would like with any of the children." This desire for a relationship with a child is also not met in her personal life, as BS said "I don't have children[or] brothers and sisters so there are no nieces and nephews ... I don't see children outside of school except LS and her family and that's really important." Consequently BS said "I just sometimes sit as they do the family thing and I'm just amazed...I like her family and....it's fun just to go over there and watch them all interact."

For BS #1 the most significant moments with her LS are "the days when she says I have something to tell you [or] she wants to show me something." What is important to BS about sharing these moments with her Little is that "it's

making the relationship closer, growing closer.” To illustrate how the relationship is growing closer BS explained that one time after they had been out “[LS] said come on you have to see and there was this big tree and she was demonstrating all her tricks on it and that’s really nice she wants to show *me* something and I like that feeling.”

In describing their relationship BS #1 said “our relationship maybe has been a sort of slow growing and that’s fine for me.” BS #1 believed this slow growing was in part due to the fact she is “not overly emotional and takes time to build that [closeness]” and she also “senses that LS #1 has that element of not wanting to jump too quickly into a serious relationship.”

BS #1 recalled thinking “here we are in a relationship that’s supposed to be so close and everyone is supposed to be oh yes it’s so close and here we are two total strangers ... it was awkward.” As BS explained “it just takes a while to build something that isn’t forced and artificial. At first “it was really funny I mean we didn’t know one another and we had no reason to know one another except that we’d been matched up...it was just strange.” One thing BS stated that helped them in the beginning of their relationship was “finding something to do that would keep [them] busy or provide [them] with something to talk about. This was not difficult for BS as “right from the start it was fairly apparent we were going to get along fine ... we just had to grow into it.” For BS growing into it meant ‘spending time together, becoming comfortable, talking, and listening to what isn’t being said.’” Early in their relationship LS #1 “expressed interest in becoming a teacher and ...wanted to know what it was like and what I did and so I

shared those kinds of things.” BS #1 explained that “we don’t need to find exciting activities anymore...we can enjoy something low key” like throwing sticks to her dog on the beach or building forts.

BS #1 has noticed that recently LS #1 is taking the initiative more often in their relationship and she is starting to take the control that was always there for her.” One of the ways this control is now being used by LS #1 is that “she has started to call me” and to BS #1 this means that her LS is “maybe opening up and becoming closer.” Presently BS #1 senses they are relating “more on a equal level” and this is novel to BS #1 who as a teacher was more familiar with the somewhat authoritarian atmosphere of many teacher-student relationships. Of great significance to BS #1 was that unlike her teaching relationships, decision making is shared between herself and her LS. According to BS #1 “she [LS] has input and say and if she doesn’t want to do something then maybe we won’t do it and if I don’t want to do something then maybe we will do it.”

BS #1 benefits a great deal professionally and personally from her relationship with LS #1. Being a BS helps her professionally in that she now recognizes in her students what goes on “behind the scenes” and that for them and herself “there is life outside of school.” On a personal level it allows her to “express that part of herself [that is] turned on by childish things.” Having a LS provides her with an opportunity to “go to child oriented activities that I would not necessarily go to on my own.” BS #1 acknowledged that at first being a BS was about “playing a positive part in someone else’s life.. helping and being a volunteer in my community.” While this is still part of her motivation “the

emphasis is now on my fulfillment, my enjoyment, my participation in what we do...it's about having a young person in my life." With a smile on her face, BS explained "it makes me feel good to know that I'm doing something for someone and yet I have fun too ... it's very rewarding emotionally."

Meaningful Phrases Big Sister #1

Based on repeated examination of the information shared during the interview with this BS and reiterated above, four representative meaningful phrases surfaced. They are as follows: **Desire to Contribute to a Child's Life**, **Opening Up and Growing Closer**, **Expressing Ourselves Through Common Interests**, and **Personal Enrichment and Fulfillment**. These phrases are used to capture the meaning of her experience as a Big Sister, as understood through her personal interview.

BS #1 made her decision to volunteer out of her remembrance of a childhood friend who was a LB and how special that relationship was for him. BS #1's relationship with LS #1 has been growing closer as time passes. For BS #1 spending time together and getting to know each other allowed them to become more comfortable and authentic. BS #1 spoke at length of the many ways this relationship is enriching and fulfilling, on both personal and professional levels. She found that at the beginning of the match she focused on her Little's enjoyment whereas now she is more conscious of her own. By having a LS she is able to seize opportunities for 'childish' play. It is very important to this BS just to have a young person in her life as she is an only child and doesn't have friends or family who's children she can enjoy. She also finds that the perspective she

gains from time spent with LS #1 and her family enriches her work as a school teacher. She is better able to relate to her students having gained some deeper recognition for their lives outside of school.

Match Essence

This match between a young girl and woman has been active for just over one year. They have moved through some initial awkwardness and doubt and are well on their way to building a friendship. They share an interest in arts and crafts as well as an openness to friends and families in the wider circles of each of their lives.

Time has encouraged and continues to encourage this match along the continuum from strangers to friends. With the passage of time they have found a level of comfort which is facilitating the development of a more personal connection. As BS #1 said during her interview, when they meet now she doesn't feel driven to find a really high interest activity for them to do. Now they are able to get together and just play on the beach with her dog. Also, when they are out together they aren't aware of time in the way that they were when first matched. A significant piece of the importance of time in the development of ease and intimacy in this match may have to do with who they are as individuals. BS #1 explained that like herself she sensed that "LS #1 also has that element of not wanting to jump too quickly into a serious relationship."

Another part of the essence of this match is about need fulfillment. In the meaningful phrase for LS #1 about Mom's busyness and BS #1's reasons for being a Big, there is an impression that a gap in each of their lives was and

perhaps still is being filled through this relationship. The LS was clear that her mother was too busy to do with her the kind of activities that BS #1 does. In fact, LS #1 sees her BS as more available to her than her "schedule" requires. Close to the beginning of BS #1's interview she suggested that her life previous to becoming a Big was in transition. As she said, she was "feeling a little bored with life." For Match #2 spending time together helped them to avert those places of wanting for company or activity.

Another shared essence of this match is interests. Both LS #1 and BS #1 spoke of enjoying fairs, crafts, and play. Finding these points of commonality were essential in the early unfamiliar days as they provided them both with something to do and something to talk about together. Now that their relationship has progressed, creative activities, such as making crafts together, offer both of them an opportunity for match rejuvenation, self-expression and mutual fun.

This final point in many ways is an amalgamation of the shared meanings described above and therefore may represent Match #2's true essence. Both BS #1 and LS #1 gain from being matched and articulated the benefits in their interviews. The benefit for LS #1 is doing things she wouldn't normally get to do, such as going to fairs and learning new crafts. For BS #1 the benefit is a sense of fulfillment, opportunities to interact with children and their families, and finally an excuse to "enjoy childish things." There is an obvious qualitative difference in the benefits expressed by this Big and Little. The Big emphasized how her relationship with LS #1 and LS's family impacted the depth of her personal and professional world view. Conversely LS #1 focused on *what* they did together

and *how fun* the activities were according to her personal inventory of likes and dislikes. It is interesting to note that LS #1 felt she and BS #1 had different needs in terms of the frequency of their visits. She wanted to see BS #1 “when she felt like it” but she felt BS #1 wanted to see her “whenever she can.” Overall these two people are together because in the relationship BS #1 feels enriched and fulfilled and LS #1 feels informed and entertained.

Match #3

The final match is what is known at BBBS as a cross-gender match and consists of a Big Sister and Little Brother. They were matched on July 27, 1993 and usually see each other once each week although lately their contact has been less frequent due to LB #2's recent move and BS #2's work demands. This Big and Little spend time on their own or with friends of the BS and do not typically attend BBBS events. Phone contact and invitations extend both ways in this match. They enjoy the outdoors; walking, swimming and biking and are equally content to hang out at BS #2's home; having dinner and watching a movie or playing pool. Together this Big and Little talk about their lives, about what and how they are doing. LB #2 lives on a boat with his father and a younger sister who also has a Big Sister. Theirs is an up front and personal match with a lot of discussion and fun.

Synopsis Little Brother #2

This Little Brother's father brought him in to the BBBS office for his interview after school on a weekday. When he arrived he was bright and curious about how I planned to conduct the interview. He was nervous about how he

would sound on audio tape but eager to begin. He was very direct and forthcoming during the interview, frequently providing detailed accounts of his match without prompting. The following is a synopsis of his interview which took approximately one and a half hours.

According to LB #2 "my sister got one [a BS] and so I was lonely cause she was always gone....and so my Dad asked me if I wanted one and I said yes and he said well OK fine I'll get you one then." He added that "if I didn't have one I'd be getting one now cause I'd be either lonely or sad." LB #2 further explained "if I didn't have a BS I would never get out I would be like watching movies or playing games." Due to the opportunity afforded by his BS he "goes swimming and biking a lot more than I used to."

The most important thing to LB #2 about having his BS is "friendship, we are friends and you need friends." LB #2 explained their friendship "is different now [than at the beginning because] we know each other a lot better." Now he knows "she likes to go biking [and] her job and how she does it and what she's like and what she does." To LB #2 friendship means "we've spent a lot of time together and we're happy and we're doing stuff." Togetherness is an important aspect of his match. As he stated, aside from the enjoyment of *what* they do "the other part [of importance] is that we're together; if I go out ... and there's nobody there it's not going to be fun."

LB #2 also described BS #2 as nice because when "I told her about people at school and how they act jerky she taught me how to deal with it" She told me "just be friendly and ask 'hey guys can I join in?' and that sometimes it should

work and sometimes it doesn't." His friendship with BS #2 is different than friendships with people his age because "friends who are my age they're mostly liars and they don't really like me...it's kind of a mood streak thing one day they like me the other day they don't."

For LB #2 a significant aspect of this three year friendship is not that it is reliable but that "she doesn't pick on me like other people do." LB #2 talked about his feelings of security with BS #2. He explained that "she's nice...she's doesn't get mad or just boozing cause I told her how I felt cause I saw my mom like that and so she understands." This awareness allowed him to feel "comfortable...knowing that she's not going to get drunk or fight or anything like that."

Meaningful Phrases Little Brother #2

After repeated reviews of the information shared during LB #2's interview and in the synopsis just presented several meaningful phrases emerged from the data. As in the previous two cases these phrases may not be expressed in the exact words of LB #2 but are a declaration of the information he provided. There are three meaningful phrases and they are as follows: **Spending A Lot of Time Together, Something To Do and Someone To Do It With** and **A Stable and Safe Friendship.**

LB #2 often stated how much time he and BS #2 had spent together and how long they had known each other, this is what is meant by the phrase Spending A Lot of Time Together. He explained that both he and BS #2 had moved during the match but that in spite of the distance they had remained

friends. He felt that they could be friends even if one of them moved to another city. The phrase Something To Do and Someone To Do It With highlights how having a BS makes a difference to LB #2. For LB #2 there are both emotional and recreational benefits to his having a BS; he is not lonely and gets to do things that he wouldn't otherwise do. There are many meanings present in the phrase A Stable and Safe Friendship. In his match with BS #2, LB #2 has found someone who accepts him, helps him and respects him. With BS #2 he feels safe and secure, and he gives the impression that he doesn't often feel this way with his other friends. LB #2 also described contacts with his mother where he clearly did not feel safe or comfortable. Consequently having this level of security with BS #2 is very important to him.

Synopsis Big Sister #2

This was the last of the six interviews and took place with BS #2 at the BBBS office on a Saturday morning. When I arrived, BS #2 was already there and ready to start. She was tired after a series of night shifts at work but since she had already canceled one appointment to do her interview, she wanted to go ahead as scheduled. BS #2 explained that this last while has been a particularly challenging time to keep appointments and apologized for canceling earlier.

BS #2 explained that she "wanted to be a Big for a long time but was working shift work and just put it off and put it off." Eventually however, she "just came in, had the thing [orientation and interviews] and met LB #2." She said "it took quite a while to get a match [but] that I think if I was stuck with some little girl that was timid then I wouldn't have a good match [because] I like doing things

that are rough and tough.” BS #2 described LB #2 as “very like me...he’s very matter of fact about things.” During the initial interview process BS #2 mentioned to her caseworker that she’d “rather have a boy [because she] already knew how to handle boys.”

BS #2 told of many different times when she explained or taught her LB ‘the way things are.’ When he told her he was being picked on for being skinny she said to him “you’re a little boy, you’re growing up, you’re gonna [sic] be skinny, your hormones are out of whack and that’s the way it is.” She says “anytime he talks about school I always go, LB you’re gonna [sic] have to get along, that’s where ya [sic] are, you have to deal with it and you are big enough now!” At the beginning of their match, when LB #2’s mom died she said to him:

well LB you know my mom’s dead too and you know you have to go through all that as a kid...nobody’s gonna [sic] be around forever...it’s gonna [sic] happen, I’m not gonna [sic] be around forever, you’re not gonna [sic] be around forever, your dad’s not gonna [sic] be here forever and you know you have to deal with that and I know it’s hard.

BS #2 sees herself “as a role model, friend, mentor and....coach.” BS #2 said she has taught him a few things, that he has a lot of respect for her, that he can talk to her, that she doesn’t give up on him, and that her place is a safe haven for him. She explained she’s “just trying to help somebody out...be a companion and give him a bit of...[what] he might not get at home.” It is her hope that with a bit of her “coaching he will find his way. BS #2 sees LB #2 as “sort of part of [her] family but on the other hand he’s kind of like another...project of

mine.” She said ‘it’s really tough [for him]....so I better make a difference in [his] life.”

BS #2 views the relationship between herself and LB #2 as a “friendship and think[s] it will be for a long time.” She explained that she “loves kids” and doesn’t care how old her friends are. She added that LB #2 is a “big part of her friend circle.” She admitted “I may not be a BS forever but I hope to keep in contact with him as long as I live.” BS #2 said “we’ve grown closer over the years” At first she felt he probably thought she was:

kind of weird and loud and opinionated...but now he’s so use [sic] to me...like I grab him by the shoulders and shake him and toughen him up a bit....I think he probably likes that cause I don’t think he’s like that at home.

According to BS #2 “we’ve grown together a lot and he’s got a bit of my sense of humor now.”

Meaningful Phrases Big Sister #2

Upon review of the data collected during the interview with BS #2 four themes were revealed. These themes are as follows: **Getting Used To Each Other, I Know What That’s Like For A Kid, Telling It Like It Is, and He’s One of my Close Friends.** Although these phrases are not an exact replication of the words of BS #2, they suitably represent the meanings of the experiences she related.

The first phrase, Getting Used To Each Other, represents the importance BS #2 placed on being herself, getting to know her LB and allowing him to get to know her. BS #2 felt this true presentation of themselves made it possible for

them to grow together. BS #2 related that she and LB have similar communication styles; matter of fact and not too emotional. This common approach to communication means that when LB #2 shares his problems with her she can respond in a way that she is comfortable with and he is able to understand. The meaningful phrase, He's One of my Close Friends, means exactly what it says, for BS #2, LB #2 is a friend who she hopes will be in her life always.

Match Essence

The friendship, understanding and time between this young boy and woman are meaningful and treasured aspects of both of their lives. As BS #2 put it "he's a big part of my friend circle." The importance of their relationship was almost palpable during their interviews. After three years together they had developed similar gestures and manners of speech and often used the same memories to articulate their experiences. Based on the moments described and words used by all six participants, this match appeared to demonstrate a high degree of harmony and intimacy.

As in the previous two matches the amount of time these two had been together was significant for both BS #2 and LB #2. However, for Match #3 the time spent together was held up, particularly by LB #2, almost as testimony to how important they are to each other. It almost sounded like *because* they have known each other for this long they would know each other forever. This element was unique to their story, because in the other two matches, the value of time was that it allowed them opportunities to get to know and become comfortable

with each other. The inevitable adjustment period afforded by the passage of time was also present in this match, although it appeared to be more noticeable to BS #2 than LB #2. For Match #3 time was meaningful as a marker of their commitment as well as a mechanism for establishing understanding and trust.

There is a genuine, unconditional and affectionate interplay between these two individuals. LB #2 talked often about his BS as being someone he felt safe and secure with. In his words, he suggested that this kind of acceptance was not something he found in many other relationships. BS #2 often reflected on "what that's like for a kid" and used this form of empathy to create a "safe haven" for her LB. LB #2 felt he did the same for her; about her father's knee, he explained how he listened and showed his interest and demonstrated that he *understood* how she felt. The relationship is a place of learning for both Big and Little. In BS #2's words she tells him "the way it is" in the 'real' world, and he shows her the way it is in his world. He shares with her his social struggles and she coaches him, either by instruction or capitulation.

A rewarding and heartfelt friendship is at the heart of this match. As LB #2 tried to say in his interview, it is not so much *what* they do but rather that they do it *together*. He definitely sees BS #2 as his friend and seemingly one of his closest. BS #2 is clearly comfortable and gratified in her position as advisor, confidante and friend. In listening to BS #2 describe her friendship with LB #2, it seems that their bond is meaningful to her as it was, is and will be in the future. In the content, feelings and transcriptions of the interviews with this Big and Little togetherness resounds.

Themes Across Match Roles

Presentation of Littles' themes

The first three columns in Table 1 present a summary of the meaningful phrases identified for each Little in the study. The fourth column in Table 1, labelled Group Themes, identifies which of the meaningful phrases for the individual Littles are shared by either or both of the other Littles. Titles of themes shared by all the Littles are presented in bold type in the fourth column, while those shared by only one of the other two remain in plain type. After a review of the information provided by the raw interview data, each Little's synopsis and this table, those themes which cut across the group of Littles emerged. These themes have been identified in Table 1 as: **Turning Strangers into Friends** and **Life is Better because I Have a Big**.

The first theme captured the relationship development process that Littles experienced from the point of being matched to the time they were interviewed. In different words and sometimes with a different focus each Little Brother or Sister said that compared to when they first met they now are closer to their Bigs, more comfortable with each other, and more aware of their Bigs' lives. To varying degrees of emphasis, each of the Littles articulated that they felt awkward and somewhat shy at the beginning of the match and that this feeling lessened as time passed. All three Littles proudly described in relative detail the occupations, friends, family, habits, interests, and homes of their Bigs.

Table 1
Little-Meaningful Phrases and Identification of Group Themes

Meaningful Phrases LB #1	Meaningful Phrases LS #1	Meaningful Phrases LB #2	Group Themes
Getting to Know BB	Now that We Know We're Comfortable	Spending A Lot of Time Together	Making a Stranger into a Friend
I'm Not Lonely or Bored When With BB	I Get To Do New Stuff that I Enjoy Doing	Something To Do & Someone To Do It With	Life is Better Because I have a Big
Being Really Close Friends		A Stable and Safe Friendship	Friends Forever
Finding Common Interests	My Mom Is Busy/ BS Is Available		

Table 2
Big-Meaningful Phrases and Identification of Group Themes

Meaningful Phrases BB #1	Meaningful Phrases BS #1	Meaningful Phrases BS #2	Group Themes
Becoming Ourselves	Opening Up & Growing Closer	Getting Used to Each Other	From Project To Friend
He Reminds Me of Myself	We Have Common Likes/dislikes	I Know What That's Like For A Kid	Been There Done That
He Helps Me Be Less Serious	Personal Enrichment and Fulfillment		Having a Little Improves My Life
A Friend For the Rest of My Life	Desire to Contribute to a Child's Life	He's One of my Close Friends	Lifelong Friends
		Telling It Like It Is	

The second theme, **Life is Better because I have a Big**, also cut across all of the Littles' experiences. Once again each Little described how life is better differently, however, they each saw themselves as having gained something positive in their lives, either emotionally or socially, because they had a Big. For the two Little Brothers a major benefit was that their Bigs were someone to keep them company and someone to talk to. For the Little Sister the benefit was that she got to do something and go places that without her Big Sister she would not have been aware. Each of these Littles believed that their Bigs met a need in their lives that previously had not been or could no longer be filled by anyone else.

Presentation of Bigs' themes

Table 2 presents meaningful phrases and shared themes for the group of Bigs in the same way that Table 1 presents similar information for the Littles group. These themes which cut across the group of Bigs have been identified as: **From Project to Friend** and **Been There Done That**.

The first theme described a process of becoming a match and relaxing into the relationship and has been named **From Project To Friend**. In the early times of their matches the Bigs recalled feeling anxious, awkward, eager to please and were quite deliberate in their actions with their Littles. As the match went on each described a process of becoming more comfortable and spontaneous about being with their Little. As BS #1 explained, they "can do more low key activities" now. For BB #1 it meant to be himself and "not be *looking* for

things to say.” BS #2 knows where her Little is coming from now and knows that he is comfortable with her “boisterous” nature.

The second theme for the Bigs was the importance of having some qualities or experiences in common and this has been named **Been There Done That**. This was the theme most clearly shared across the Bigs. All of the Bigs spoke of having interests, experiences, and/or personality characteristics similar to those of their Littles. According to BS #1 “it wasn’t difficult because we do have a lot of similar likes and dislikes.” All three of the Bigs related to situations their Littles experienced or traits they demonstrated by remembering things that happened to them or what they were like as children. BB #1 explained “it reminds me of myself ... I can relate to him.” Out of empathy for her LB who recently had to move away from his friends, BS #2 said “It’s hard on a kid. My dad was in the navy so I know that. I moved from here to there and everywhere.”

Thematic differences across match roles

Although there were places of similar themes across the group of Littles and also the group of Bigs, there were also thematic differences. One difference in the Littles’ group was that LS #1 did not identify her BS as a friend, but rather as someone who is friendly. This was not the case for LBs #1 and #2 who both clearly identified their Bigs as friends. Another difference between Match #2 and Matches #1 and #3, highlighted by the data in LS #1’s interview, was that LS #1 emphasized the recreational benefit of the relationship with her BS such as going to interesting places and doing fun things, while LBs #1 and #2 focused on both recreational *and* emotional or relational benefits. Also, LS #1 was the only Little

to identify that because her mother was very busy and unable to spend a lot of time with her recreationally, she needed a Big Sister to do those type of activities with her.

The Bigs' group had less thematic difference than the Littles group. The primary difference was that the Bigs in Matches #1 and #3 identify themselves as having mutual friendships with their Littles while BS #1 in Match #2 didn't speak specifically of friendship at all. Although BS #1 described behaviors and exchanges between she and her LS that were typical of friends, she did not name the relationship as a friendship. This is noteworthy as it corresponds with the way her LS describes BS #1 as friendly but does not identify her as a friend. Another difference was BS #2's description of how she communicates with LB #2 and how that fits their relationship. When LB #2 shares an issue in his life with her she tells it like it is, and this seems to support both his need for a reality check and her need to give one. BB #1 and BS #1 conveyed more about what they talked about with their Littles, rather than how.

Universal Themes

After meaningful phrases, match essences, and shared themes were identified it became possible to discern the universal or meta-themes. In seeking universal themes, the group themes were examined in terms of the meaning of what was said and also what meaning was implied by what was said. Therefore, a careful analysis of words and meaning in terms of their "lived" relationships was conducted. This part of the results chapter is a presentation of those explicit and implicit themes which cut across the boundaries of individuals, matches and

groups. There was only one phenomenon of the match relationship which was explicitly manifest in each of the interviews. This universally explicit theme has been named **Turning a Match into Our Friendship**.

For the Littles group this theme meant knowing; knowing more about the life, likes and dislikes, personality, home and possessions of the Big Brother or Sister. As shown by the interview data, each Little grew increasingly comfortable and natural with their Big Brother or Sister as they knew more about who she or he was as a person. As described verbally by the Littles, this knowing was fundamental and literal, such as knowing whether to take their shoes off in the Big's house.

Similar to the Littles' descriptions, as the matches aged, Bigs also felt more authentic and unguarded in the match relationship. They found they were planning, pleasing and entertaining less and just 'being' more than they had been at the beginning of their matches. Each of the Bigs seemed to come into the match relationship with great expectations of themselves to make or be the difference in the child's life. Over time, this remedial focus softened and Bigs began to present a more genuine show of themselves, flaws and faults included. This shift away from an almost philanthropic orientation to relationship with the child, toward a more intrinsic interest in being with them, seemed to lead the Bigs into more natural relationships with their Littles.

A wider examination of the universal theme, Turning a Match into Our Friendship, as well as the shared themes in Tables 1 and 2, revealed several implicit themes. Although these additional themes were not literal translations of

the interview data they are reflective of the meanings rooted in the words used by participants and in their group themes. These implicit themes attest to the more intangible elements of the match relationship. **Actively Being and Becoming, Mutual Ownership, Acceptance and Relatedness, and Personal Benefit** are phrases used to identify the meaningful phenomena implicit in the shared themes.

The theme **Actively Being and Becoming**, is a more meaningful translation of the first explicit theme. This implied theme indicates that the match relationship is a *process* not an *event*. In other words, making a match is not the same as building a relationship. An essential piece of the process of building the relationship depends on *being* themselves. When Bigs and Littles were able to come together and 'just be' themselves, imperfect and authentic, *becoming* friends was possible. Another aspect of this theme which is implied by the data is that the relationship between the Big and Little is dynamic; progressing and retreating, growing and changing.

Part of what happened when Bigs and Littles spent time together, Being and Becoming was that they became personally invested in the match as *our* match. Each of these Bigs and Littles were in relationships that they described as being about *us*, or *we*, or *my* Big, *my* Little, and *my* match. For example LS #1 said she didn't know why BBBS kept sending her newsletters. In her mind, she and her BS now have a self-sustained relationship that belongs to them and not the BBBS organization. This implied phenomenon has been named **Mutual Ownership**.

Threads of **Acceptance and Relatedness** are entwined throughout the experiences of each person in the match relationship. In these relationships, the Bigs and Littles were constantly measuring themselves up to and against their perceptions of each other, testing the limits of themselves and their relationship and consistently finding a place of belonging and positive regard. Both Bigs and Littles talked about having and developing shared interests, goals and expectations. The common feelings of pride, acceptance, and recognition contained in their voices were palpable. In each story there were examples of how one person in the match looked up to or learned from the other. There is an impression that sometimes these lessons were immediate and obvious while other times they were subtle and nonspecific.

The next implied theme is **Personal Benefit**. Although none of the Bigs or Littles described the same gain, nor did all of them articulate a gain, each participant established, in different ways, how the match relationship benefited them individually. One aspect of the personal gain for both Littles and Bigs was that they had fun together. Although not every participant referred specifically to fun as a benefit of being matched, its presence was unmistakable in their descriptions of match outings and events. For example, BB #1 plays football which his LB typically doesn't enjoy however, LB #1 said (about football) during his interview "I don't usually like it but [with BB #1] it's fun!"

The benefits implied by the Littles group were recreational or socio-emotional. Littles described feelings of entertainment and happiness, as well as companionship through the relationship with their Big. The same benefits were

found in the Bigs group. Bigs reported feelings of fulfillment, importance, and validation. In different ways these relationships provide the participants with an opportunity to grow and risk in an atmosphere of acceptance, belonging, understanding and physical and emotional safety.

Reflections on the Data from Participants,

BBBS Staff and External Bigs

After the interview data was analysed it was then shared with the participants, the BBBS staff including caseworkers, secretary and executive director and also with three Bigs who are successfully matched to Littles in the Victoria BBBS program, but were not of the six Bigs and Littles interviewed in this study. Presentation of the data to the various groups was done to determine whether what was said by participants was resonant with their experiences in and of Big/Little relationships.

Participant reflections

When the findings were shared with the participants they were asked to read through their segments to identify any information that they felt did not reflect their experience as a Big or Little, and also, to identify any information which they did not want disclosed. Bigs and Littles were encouraged to review the information and indicate whether they felt the phrases, essences and themes were valid according to their experiences.

The Bigs and Littles were touched and surprised to read their stories captured in print. When questioned about their personal reactions to the analyses feelings of shock and surprise seemed to relate more to their

embarrassment at how they expressed themselves than what had been written. All of the participants confirmed that the individual and match analyses truly represented their individual and match experiences. Although some participants asked for minor adjustments in the particular words used, they all felt the phrases and essences accurately conveyed their feelings and thoughts in and about their relationships.

BBBS staff reflections

Early in the research process I asked the caseworkers at BBBS to articulate individually and in writing, what they personally held as the criteria for a good match. As I did not want this information to influence me in the analysis of the interviews I asked the executive director to keep the responses until the data analysis was complete and then I asked for them.

One caseworker indicated that her criteria was simply that the parent, Big and Little report during follow-up contacts that they like each other and think the match is a good one. The other caseworkers had several criteria such as, consistent communication, a strong bond, assimilation into each other's lives, positive feedback, willingness to trust, fun, that they are available to each other in times of hardship, commitment, respect and regular contact. The caseworkers' criteria clearly resonated with the essences revealed for each of the matches in this study. Once again the presence of mutual acceptance, relatedness, benefit and trust appear. For example, in different language each of the caseworkers imply that good relationships are beneficial and fun for both the Big and Little and this was also true for each of the Bigs and Littles interviewed.

After analysis of the data, the findings of the study were shared with the BBBS staff including the executive director, three caseworkers and secretary. Using rough tables as a discussion tool, the following reflections were generated from the BBBS staff. As the themes found in this study indicated, the BBBS staff agreed with those themes which indicated that matches go through a process of relationship development that has emotional and social components. The caseworkers concurred that those initial feelings of formality, fear and awkwardness, as described by the Bigs and Littles in this study, were experiences that they often heard when doing follow-up contact with matches. The staff were particularly interested in the presence or absence of overt friendship in the matches interviewed and offered many clinical explanations for these differences. However, they recognized that it was true of their practice experiences that some individuals do define themselves and each other as friends, while others do not.

In terms of the other themes identified in the study, the staff also concurred. At first they struggled to relate to the language used to represent each theme but after very brief explanations they indicated that what had been identified did reflect their understanding of BBBS matches. The themes of process rather than event, personal benefit, and acceptance were instantly recognizable, while the themes of mutual ownership and relatedness took more time to identify in terms of their casework experiences.

External Bigs' Reflections

For the purpose of cross-validation, themes identified in this study were

also shared with three Bigs who were not participants in this study. The Bigs who were consulted are referred to as: BS A, who has been matched to a LS for two years, BS B, who has been matched to a LS for two years, and BB C, who still considers himself a LB to the BB he was matched to over fifteen years ago, who also has been a BB to a LB for one year.² Separate discussions occurred between the researcher and each of these people to establish whether or to what extent the themes used to present the lived experiences of the participants were congruent with their own match experiences.

Each of these Bigs agreed that over time the relationships they have with their Littles changed from awkward acquaintances or strangers to close friends. These Bigs also agreed that the match is dynamic and reflective of *who* and *how* they are at any given time. For example the BB said, "he's him and I'm me and we are us" (personal communication with BB C, October 21, 1996). These Bigs also related to the themes of acceptance and relatedness and each agreed that these themes were a significant component of the personal benefits of being a Big. Opportunities for friendship, play, acceptance and meaning were part of the themes which resonated with participants and non-participants alike. According to the these Bigs, the BBBS staff and the Bigs and Littles who participated in this study, these matches create a rich environment that offer both the child and adult room to 'just be' as well as a safe place to risk, change and grow.

² These Bigs were known to the researcher from her experience as a Caseworker at BBBS and expressed interest in contributing to this study.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Phenomenology was used as the framework to support qualitative interviews with three Bigs and three Littles from the Victoria office of Big Brothers and Big Sisters. The purpose of this study was to understand the essence of relationships between Big and Little Brothers and Sisters in the BBBS organization. BBBS is a well known international program which supports thousands of young children across North America and the United Kingdom. While mandates and processes vary slightly from agency to agency across Canada, the intended outcome remains constant: to establish positive and enriching relationships between children and adult volunteers. Analysis of data derived from interviews produced meaningful phrases, match essences, shared themes, and universal themes. This final chapter is a discussion of the significance of the findings of this investigation and their implications for BBBS and CYC practice and future research.

Significance of the Study

The value of this study lies in its ability to accurately communicate what has been understood about the essence of relationships between Bigs and Littles. As Joseph (1994) notes the use of verbatim quotes “invites the reader to engage with participants on a human level [and that] much of the value of this work lies in the personalization of the story” (p. 128). The merit of the findings presented is that they are authentic expressions of the lived experiences of Bigs and Littles, carefully enfolded within the context of their relationships. Findings

presented in this study enhance and support the literature from BBBS and the disciplines of education, and child and youth care.

After months of analysing data, presenting findings and discussing the implications of this study on paper and in person, I find myself reviewing some of my earlier questions and beliefs about relationships between children and non-family adults. Although I continue to hold relationship at the core of my work in CYC, I notice that I am becoming less interested in discussions about or explorations of 'good' versus 'bad' helping relationships. Through this research I have grown to value and respect relationships as they are, and to appreciate them without the judgement behind the labels of good or bad. I now see the limitations and costs of a practice that is fastidiously based on saying, doing or being the 'good' practitioner or expert. I am better able to recognize and therefore strive to overcome the barriers, that I have grown accustomed to as a CYC professional, which have prevented me from engaging with children and youth on a personal level.

The findings in this study of Big-Little relationships suggest that meaning making in relationships is a highly personal and genuine process. In fact, this study shows that what Bigs and Littles valued and benefited most from thier relationships was mutual definition, disclosure and application of self. As a professional in CYC I have not felt encouraged to be personally in relationship with a child. When I reflect on my career in CYC and discussions with colleagues I am reminded of how rarely we talk about being personal in our work. My impression has been that if I presented myself as personally involved or engaged

in my work, then I risked being labelled ineffective or unprofessional by my peers. It has seemed as though being personally involved with the work is considered an indication of inexperience or poor boundaries. Furthermore, it seems that when the personal was openly discussed the focus was on issues of professional burnout and setting boundaries rather than the reward or importance of letting ourselves into the relationship and empowering children or youth to know who we are as people, as well as CYC workers. Nevertheless, the findings in this study have made it obvious to me that in meaningful helping relationships, sharing the personal is professional.

Although I continue to be conscious of the therapeutic context and intended outcome of the relationships I enter with children and youth as a CYC worker, I now strive to balance this focus with opportunities to show and share who I am. I do this by recognizing and accepting the invitations extended by children and youth as they try to identify with me, seeking to expose who and how I am. I am striving to bridge the distance created, between myself and the people I work with, by the titles of professional and expert which I once sought. I take risks to expose my humanness and overtly appreciate clients for the opportunities they offer me to grow and develop.

In these relationships children and adults have the opportunity to give of and receive unto themselves unconditionally. A Big Sister who was not in the study, and works at the BBBS agency, stated that her relationship with her LS meant "loving regardless of actions, acceptance without judgment, and having opinions without expectations" (personal communication, September 1, 1996).

Bigs and Littles in relationship actively seek to identify their relatedness and discover their acceptance of each other. When I began this study I questioned what the essence of relationships between Bigs and Littles was. Although I have witnessed the variety and uniqueness across these three matches, I have been able to identify some shared elements. I now understand that the spirit of such relationships is an amalgam of acceptance and caring. As Yamamoto (1988) explained:

What is sought is not praise, reward, or pity, all of which are an accounting of the past. Rather it is *regard* - an acknowledgment of one's personhood as well as trust in what is and is to come - that is desired (p.184).

One of the external Bigs, in responding to the match data, suggested that her relationship with her Little Sister affords her the chance to make sense of and perhaps even to heal some of the hurts of childhood. This chance to give and get in the same action is noteworthy as it upholds the attention and interest of both child and adult in these relationships. Mead (1978) observed "the demand that everyone listen and be listened to is the hope of an endangered but potentially self-healing world" (p.157).

It is also significant that these relationships require an openness and willingness to change. The relationships' survival appears to be linked to an ongoing process of evolution and adaptation at both the individual and match levels. Variation and growth must be recognized as necessary and positive ingredients in the successful and long-term match relationship. As is the known truth of most relationships, positive response to change is fundamental in Big-Little friendships.

Related to an openness to change comes a willingness to risk. In order to have a comfortable relationship Bigs and Littles must reveal their genuine self to the other. This process of self-disclosure is uncertain and indefinite; neither partner is sure what they will be called to reveal or how the other will respond. Bigs and Littles encounter their private fears of potential failure or rejection as part of this element of socio-emotional risk.

Matches described a process of shedding their initial impulses to please or impress each other and becoming themselves. They described how the rejection of this pretense increased their comfort with each other and decreased the amount of effort the relationship required. When relating from the personal in relationship an opportunity is created for both participants to “address the most critical existential questions of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘How do I fit into the world?’” (Fewster, 1991, p. 28). The relationship between a Big and Little provides each person with the occasion to seek and find answers to these important questions. This study shows that an integral part of the essence of the relationship for both Bigs and Littles is to examine; who the other person is?, what to reveal of him/herself to the other person and finally, how he or she fits with the other person?

Implications for BBBS

Information taken from the interviews of these six Bigs and Littles at BBBS of Victoria was informative and impactful. The five universal themes: Turning a Match into Our Friendship, Actively Being and Becoming, Mutual Ownership, Acceptance and Relatedness, and finally Personal Benefits serve to illuminate the

essence of the Big-Little relationship in ways which were previously suggested but not examined. In this study, my primary research question was: According to Bigs and Littles, what is the essence of the relationship between Bigs and Littles? This study was able to identify that the essence of the relationship between these six Bigs and Littles is: ***a dynamic friendship actualized through mutual acceptance and sustenance which enriches the lives and fosters the personal development of both participants.*** This new awareness has implications for the practice and policy of BBBS programs. It suggests that certain elements of these relationships be communicated to Bigs, Littles, parents and BBBS staff.

The first theme, Turning a Match into Our Friendship, articulates that a match is not an instant friendship. It suggests that part of the recognized work of being in a Big-Little relationship is to create a friendship. Their descriptions of the initial awkwardness and shock of meeting each other indicates they did not feel prepared for this strangeness. It also alludes to their discomfort with what they perceived to be the organizational expectation; that they will be close, comfortable and friendly with each other. Not surprisingly these Bigs and Littles initially felt very unprepared to spend time together with a person who they felt they knew almost nothing about.

In Big-Little relationships a significant amount of the energy and activity of the relationship is aimed at building trust. Although this need to establish trust may not always be obvious to the Big or Little, it was clearly present in three of the implicit themes: Actively Being and Becoming, Mutual Ownership, and

Acceptance and Relatedness. The BBBS program would better serve its participants if building trust was an explicit focus. This focus would be especially helpful in the screening and follow-up phases of the program as well as during volunteer training. It seems obvious that the issue of how to establish trust when building a relationship needs to be addressed and explored with Littles, Bigs, and parents throughout the process. The findings of this study suggest that what is effective in terms of establishing trust and building relationships is getting to know the general and specific details of each other's lives.

Related to this issue of trust Bigs and Littles might be encouraged to be their human selves in the relationship right from the start. It seemed that when the participants were able to just be who they are without trying to impress the other, the match became real and the seeds of genuine friendship were planted. BBBS staff could identify this need to please as normal but also encourage and support Bigs and Littles to create and recognize opportunities to reveal their humanness to each other. As the adult role model, Bigs could be reminded during the application and training processes that it is OK to have a bad day or bad visit with their Littles and taught how they might use those occasions as 'teachable moments'.

Another essential factor captured in the first four themes is change. The constitution of the relationship between Bigs and Littles change as each person becomes more her/himself in the relationship. Matches, parents and staff can expect growing pains and must acknowledge that what the match was initially will be different than what it is presently and different again than what it will become.

These changes are reflected in the partners attitudes about the match and each other as well as in the way they present themselves to each other and the outside world. In the same way that individuals grow up, so do matches; needs, priorities and interests will change. The existence and experience of change could be explicitly addressed by the BBBS program in its policies and procedures. Follow-up contacts, particularly anniversary visits, and also volunteer training nights might be more supportive if caseworkers directly asked matches how they were managing ongoing and sometimes unwanted change.

The last reality uncovered in this study is that Bigs and Littles enter and remain in these relationships because they personally benefit from being in the relationship. This gain or benefit could be of significant value in the recruitment strategies of this program as they are constantly in need of more volunteers. Perhaps if the interested public heard what and how much Bigs said they get out of being a Big, more people would follow through with their initial interest and actually apply to be a Big Brother or Sister. This adds weight to the argument for having Bigs, Littles and Parents come to the monthly information nights held by the agency to recruit new volunteers. This act of declaring themselves may be uncomfortable for the matches but may also facilitate their development in the thematic areas of being and becoming and mutual ownership.

It occurred to the caseworkers that a great deal of effort is put into preparing the Bigs to select and meet their Littles, but the Littles' preparedness on behalf of the agency is minimal. One of the issues that became very clear for the casework staff was that Littles need and want to know more about who they

are being matched with, and that it might help to ease their anxiety if they knew something of their Bigs before they were committed to them. The matching process might be modified to include Littles at the pre-match meeting between parent and potential Big. Another consideration was that Bigs be asked to bring a written informal biography of themselves to the first meeting and that the parent could later share this biography with the child.

One caseworker noted the need for Bigs in particular to identify with their Little, and indicated that this need for Bigs to see themselves in the actions or nature of their Little's is often not known prior to the match experience. He suggested this may be a subconscious need that could be identified and explored during the interview process. The caseworkers felt that this need to identify with or relate to the Littles was appropriate and that a greater understanding of the potential Bigs' childhood experiences, challenges and attitudes could improve the overall potency of the matching process. The expectation was that if a potential Big's childhood conflicts and successes were known, the staff would be able to match him or her to a child of similar circumstance and/or disposition.

An intervention aimed at decreasing the initial awkwardness of matches would be to talk to both Bigs and Littles, during the interview process, about the reality of forming a friendship with a stranger. Each could be asked specific questions about prior experiences that would illuminate any potential areas of strength or struggle during the process of building a relationship.

Bigs and Littles could be asked to discuss the challenges and/or opportunities they imagined were part of developing such relationships. Bigs'

interviews could include questions about developing relationships with children. For example, how would they develop a relationship with a child?, what are their needs in the relationship?, how do they imagine their needs are similar or different than a child's?, and what personal resources will they draw from to address challenges that may surface in the match? Littles could be asked similar, age appropriate questions that help to uncover their unique needs and expectations in the match relationship. Littles could be asked if they have ever had an adult friend before? and if so, how that was for them?, what they enjoyed about the relationship?, and what helped them get to know the person? If the Littles have not had a relationship with an adult outside of their families it would be important to ask, what they might like to know about a potential Big whom they have not met, and what feels comfortable and uncomfortable for them when they are with adults.

Implications for Child and Youth Care

Big-Little relationships are different than and similar to those between child and youth care workers and children. Most child and youth care workers have spent years being formally educated in CYC and are paid to intervene therapeutically in the lives of children, youth and their families. As two Bigs, who are also CYC practitioners explained, when they spend time with their Littles they are not working on anything, and therefore, can just be themselves.

Big Brothers and Sisters and child and youth care workers have in common a personal and organizational mandate to enhance the development and increase the welfare of children and youth. Perhaps the fundamental similarity

between relationships in CYC and BBBS lies in the fact that the success or failure of either depends absolutely on the ability of two individuals, an adult and child or youth to form a connection that is mutually meaningful.

The three core components in CYC education are knowledge, skills and self. Education in the CYC program at UVIC is distinctly focussed on students' acquirement of the knowledge and skills required to bring children and youth through a crisis to a place of conflict or issue resolution. Unfortunately, students and professionals are often not open to the less purposeful but equally important interpersonal process between themselves and the children or youth with whom they work.

Commonly in practicum and practice experiences the components of knowledge and skill are integrated, applied and evaluated according to how useful they are in practice. However the self component, while meticulously explored and analysed, is often not entirely linked with the components of knowledge and skill, nor is its application or usefulness to practice made explicit. Although I recognize that who we are shows up in our work indirectly, I am suggesting that therapeutic relationships with children and youth would be improved if the use of self was encouraged by training programs and made explicit in practice. Furthermore, I would suggest that the present lack of openness about who we are rather than what we do as practitioners has some correlation with the high incidences of stress and burnout in health and human service professions. As practitioners who are not supported to openly be

ourselves in the relationships we are forming, we set ourselves up to be unaware of and unable to process the many personal impacts of doing this work.

Education and training in CYC falls short of addressing specifically how CYC students can apply the concepts and ideas about self and relationship that they have been taught, directly to their work in the field. It has been my experience as a student, distance education tutor, and practicum supervisor that what is presented as the main objective of CYC education is the identification, intervention and resolution of whatever is presented as a problem in a child or adolescent's life. Although training in CYC attends superficially to the need for relationship, the motivation seems to be because the above objectives could not be achieved without a relationship.

The key contribution of this study to the field of child and youth care is a deeper understanding and appreciation of the personal in meaningful relationships between children and non-family adults. The implications of the personal which apply to CYC have been broken into three categories which are: change, risk and gain. The CYC relationship requires an openness to unpredictability and change, a mutual acceptance of self and other, and a willingness to take risks.

Change is a key factor in successful BBBS relationships as in other forms of relationships. The education of students in the field of child and youth care focusses students toward the development of a comprehensive and applied understanding of those theories and interventions which facilitate *planned change*. However, the findings from this study suggest that an important piece of

the learning about change may have been overlooked. Although this enculturation process prepares CYC professionals to *do to* a child or youth in a goal-directed way, the *being with* aspect of relationship revealed in this study can be overlooked in the typically time-challenged and sometimes outcome oriented focus of the therapeutic milieu in CYC.

Another important aspect of relationships between children or youth and adults in CYC is the need for the professional to take risks. To in effect, take the risk to be personal, to come from a position of inquiry rather than knowing, to share feelings and express his or her emotions, and to be vulnerable or to fail. A large component of the clinical training in CYC is focused on self. However, this frequent exercise in self knowledge and personal insight seems to be only that; a mental and emotional exercise used to deepen awareness. The findings of this study imply that it would be useful for CYC workers to take this awareness a step further.

Rather than simply teach CYC students to be aware of their own beliefs, values, thoughts and feelings while interacting with children or youth, they might instead be taught specifically how to depend on those awarenesses to enrich the therapeutic relationship. Therefore training in CYC needs to move beyond identification and description of relationship theory or technique to actually teach CYC students first, that it is acceptable to be themselves, rather than or in addition to 'experts' and second, how to apply who they are and what they know about themselves to the therapeutic relationship.

The final implication for CYC based on the findings of this study is that relationships are more successful when there is a personal gain or benefit to both participants. The public gain for CYC workers is money; they are paid for what they do with children and youth. However, what is being suggested here are the private, less obvious, and varied reasons that people may chose CYC as a career. This notion of the personal benefit(s) experienced by the CYC worker in therapeutic relationship with children and youth has been established in the CYC literature (Ricks, 1992). Perhaps the benefits experienced by CYC workers are not dissimilar to the participants in this study; an opportunity to play again or re-examine the wounds of childhood, a chance to feel important and valued by someone, or to be understood and needed. Understanding and normalizing the personal gain(s) for the individual CYC worker might help the workers self-select themselves into particular CYC organizations that meet those personal and often unspoken agendas. Presumably, this could have a positive effect on staff retention, job satisfaction, productivity and efficiency.

The relationship elements of trust and relatedness highlighted by this study resonate with some of the literature in the fields of child and youth care and education which emphasize the need for professionals to be there for and to be with children and youth; to share the road (Anglin, 1991; Ricks, 1992; and Yamamoto, 1988). This study revealed the valid need of children and teens in care to know who the person they are assigned to is and what his or her life is about. According to Fewster (1990):

To fully appreciate the value of such concepts ... it becomes necessary to abandon ... the traditional image of a practitioner "doing something to" a child. We must step away from the magic of "intervention" in order to fully experience the mystery of two lives caught up in their own unique struggles, learning together by taking the risk to be personal" (p. 29).

Recommendations for Further Research

I began this study with a fairly non-specific interest in relationships between children and youth and non-family adults. I considered many different areas as the focus of this study and chose to leave others to other students, practitioners and otherwise interested people. Part of the process of this inquiry was to witness and record the variety of related research questions that emerged as I carried out my research. Some of these supplementary questions related to BBBS, others to CYC and some pertained to both.

At the end of my particular search for knowledge and understanding, I find I am revisiting some of the questions I held earlier. Although I chose to avoid this focus in my study, I wondered to what extent age and gender differences between the child or youth and adult effect the relationship's development and/or significance. Similarly, I questioned how the chronological or experiential ages of either the child or youth and adult impact the development of a friendship. Further research in either of these areas could be used, by the BBBS program and also CYC, to inform decisions made about pairing certain children or youth to suitable non-family adults.

The findings uncovered by this research, pertaining to personal change, risk and gain, led me to ask questions about the underlying and often unspoken belief systems held by CYC professionals, children, volunteers and parents.

Specifically, I wondered what these people would define as a successful, meaningful relationship between a child and non-family adult. This question about personal definitions of 'good' relationships also led me to ask additional questions about what prevailing socio-cultural and professional beliefs influence the above groups in terms of their own attitudes. Also, I wondered how those wider social norms and cultural values affect the micro-processes of relationship building between a child or youth and a non-family adult. Research in this area could contribute to the development of less sentimental, more practical, organizational and/or governmental policies and interventions pertaining to the importance of being personal in relationships between children or youth and non-family adults.

Finally, I wondered how prepared and supported people, whether professionals, parents or volunteers, are to be personal with children. Related to this question, I would be interested in an examination of how the need to be personal is dealt with by professional organizations, academic institutions, workplaces and volunteer programs. It would be interesting to observe what organizational factors encourage children to get personal with adults and vice versa.

Final Reflections

This research has been a reminder of my personal commitment to children and youth. I have revisited many times the beliefs and values I held about CYC and saw some remain constant while others changed. I was reminded and perhaps felt encouraged to be personal when I am co-creating therapeutic

relationships. I have been presented with an opportunity to re-evaluate my practice with children and youth and to recognize relationships where I was able or unable to embrace change and to take risks. Most importantly, I feel inspired to accept the spiritual rewards that being in a caring relationship with a child or youth perpetually extend to me.

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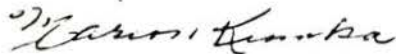
Appendix A
Letter of Permission to Conduct Study Based on
Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Victoria

February 9, 1996

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This letter is to grant permission to Marney Thompson to:

1. Conduct research toward her master's degree based on Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the Victoria Capital Region.
2. Speak to the staff about her research, with the understanding that their participation will not impact their status as employees at Big Brothers and Big Sisters of the Victoria Capital Region.
3. Interview three Big Brothers or Sisters, three Little Brothers or Sisters, and their Caseworkers, who have all agreed to participate in this research.



Marion Kumka
Executive Director

Appendix B

Summary of Study Entitled: "Understanding the Essence of the Relationship Between a Big and a Little: A Phenomenological Study"

Research Question

According to a Big Brother/Sister and Little Brother/Sister, what is the essence of the match relationship?

Objectives of the Study

1. To increase understanding of relationships between Bigs and Littles in the BBBS program.

2. To situate understanding of Big/Little relationships in the lived experience of the people who constitute those relationships, i.e. Bigs and Littles.

3. To explicitly communicate the understanding that ensues to the local and national BBBS communities, through discussion and publication of the results of this study.

Method of Inquiry

Semi-structured in-person interviews with three Bigs and three Littles at the BBBS office or at the participants, homes as they request.

Proposed Timeline

February 96	Meeting with whole BBBS staff to present study. Meeting with casework staff to identify potential participants.
March 96	Contact and consent of participants.
April 96	Conduct interviews.
May & June 96	Transcribe tapes.
July & August 96	Analyse and share data with participants.
September 96	Write first draft of thesis.
October 96	Write final draft of thesis.
November 96	Defend thesis.

Appendix C
Guide for Identification of Potential Participants in the Study Entitled:
“Understanding the Essence of the Relationship Between a Big and a
Little: A Phenomenological Study”

Appropriate participants would likely:

- a) be able to verbally express their experience of being either a Big or a Little;
- b) be interested in improving “outsiders” understanding of Big/Little relationships;
- c) be a representative example of a successful match according to the Big, Little and caseworker; and
- d) have been matched for at least one year.

Appendix D
Sample of Letter of Request to BBBS Casework Staff for the Study
Entitled: "Understanding the Essence of the Relationship Between a Big
and a Little: A Phenomenological Study"

March 15, 1996.
BBBS Victoria
103-3347 Oak Street
Victoria, BC

Dear Agency Caseworkers,

I have now been to the first meeting with my thesis advisory committee (Drs. Frances Ricks, Carol Stuart, & Max Uhlemann). What came out of our discussion is that although I emphasize that the match must see themselves as a 'good match', I have asked you to pre-select those matches you feel are 'good matches'. Consequently, I must ask you two questions. First, **through what process did you, individually and/or as a group, identify potential matches for this study?** and second, **what criteria you think makes a 'good match'?** Since I want to minimize bias, my own and others, I ask you to answer the two questions above before I start my interviews (in April) and submit your responses to Marion Kumka. She will hold these responses for me until I complete my analysis and they will be incorporated into the discussion of my findings.

Sincerest thanks,

Marney Thompson

Appendix E
Consent Form for Participation in the Study Entitled:
“Understanding the Essence of the Relationship Between a Big and a
Little: A Phenomenological Study”

I understand that this research endeavour is concerned with understanding the **relationship between a Big Brother or Sister and Little Brother or Sister** within the context of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program in Victoria, BC. I understand that the purpose of this study is to generate an initial understanding which can be built upon and used to better inform the policy making process and guide BBBS practice, I understand that I will be asked questions about **my experience as a Big/my child’s experience as a Little (circle one)** by Marney Thompson, Graduate student at the University of Victoria (UVIC), Faculty of Human and Social Development (FHSD). I understand that Marney will use the results of this study to complete the thesis requirement of her graduate studies in order to obtain her Master’s degree from UVIC.

I understand that my/my child’s participation in this study is voluntary and that I/my child can withdraw at any time, without prior notice or explanation.

I understand that my/child’s name will not be attached to the published results of this study and that all interview data collected during this study is confidential and will be stored at Marney’s home in Victoria, BC. Further, I understand that all data collected during this study will be destroyed after Marney has successfully completed her thesis.

I understand that my/child’s interviews will be audiotaped and that the tapes will be transcribed verbatim by Marney as a tool for understanding **my experience as a Big/ my child’s experience as a Little (circle one)**.

Signature of Big Brother/Sister (circle one) _____
 Signature of Little Brother/Sister (circle one) _____
 Signature of participant’s parent/guardian _____
 Signature of researcher _____

Date: _____

Please return to Marney in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

VITA

Surname: Thompson

Given Names: Marney Rochelle

Place of Birth: Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria

1988 to 1991

Camosun College

1986 to 1987

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (First Class)

University of Victoria

1991

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Title of Thesis:

Understanding the Essence of the Relationship Between a Big and Little: A Phenomenological Study

Author


Marney Rochelle Thompson
January, 1997