

Becoming Childless:
A Hermeneutical Exploration of the Voices of Fathers
Who Have Lost Contact With Their Children

by

Zane Kirby Shannon
B.A., University of Victoria, 1982
M.A., University of Victoria, 1988

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Divorce affects approximately four out of ten marriages in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001). Most researchers and clinicians agree that parental divorce and the ensuing process of a family's restructuring is a very stressful time for everyone, especially children. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the research on the effects of divorce has largely focused on how it impacts upon them (Amato, 2001). And while research, albeit to a lesser degree, has explored the impact of divorce on mothers (Demo & Acock, 1996) little attention has been given to the experience of fathers (Nielsen, 1999).

Joint custody is awarded in approximately 40% of settlements; however, mothers are typically given primary care and residence (Statistics Canada, 2001) with fathers restricted to two weekend "visits" every month (Fathers 4 Justice, 2004). Over time this amount drops to where many fathers end up seeing very little of their children. For some contact is lost altogether. Just how many lose

contact altogether is unknown, but it is suggestive that their numbers may be significant (Nielsen, 1999).

How they are affected by that loss of contact is largely unknown as research into the experience of such fathers is missing. Given most parents would agree that losing one's child is perhaps one of the worst things that could happen to them, research into this experience is warranted.

This study is an investigation of the lived experiences of fathers who have lost contact with their children. Four such fathers were interviewed. Through a hermeneutical process of "mindful-reflective" listening thirteen salient themes emerged from their stories and are conveyed to the reader. In particular, the concept of "becoming childless" is introduced as a way of understanding how these fathers dealt with the long-term consequences of losing contact with their children. Implications for further research and social change regarding fathers' rights are addressed.

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What a journey! I often felt like Frodo heading towards Mount Doom: Would this journey ever end? Had I chosen the “right path?” Was I trapped in an intellectual Emyr Muil? And there were times when I didn’t want to be doing it anymore; instead, wanting to quietly live life in the Shire. But here I am, done, and now thankful I embarked upon this academic and personal journey that has given me closure to a part of my life and the beginning of a new one.

So many people helped me get here. Everyone in their acknowledgements always states that without significant others in their lives this or that would not have been possible. To be honest I’ve rolled my eyes a few times when I’ve read these praises. But you know, it’s true. So...

First, I would like to thank my supervisors. Dr. Geoffrey Hett—your support, guidance, and belief that I could do it is deeply appreciated. Dr. Tim Black—thank you for “lighting the fire.” I can’t thank you enough for that. It made all the difference.

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To the fathers of this study—thank you for giving so much of yourself. The thoughtful, poignant insights into your lived experience are what make this study of any value. I hope I have done a service to what you shared with me.

Deborah Imbeau—I will never forget what you did for me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Finally, there is my family. To my Mom—you have been a source of perseverance, courage, and strength in the face of life’s challenges. To my bros, Lance and Eric—you’re both great guys and fathers. Lance—looking forward to jamming. Eric—“surfs up, mate!” And to my sister, Kelly...well...just teasing. You’re a great sister and mother.

And Dad—I wish you were here to see this. Something tells me, though, that you’re smiling right now and proud as can be. Miss you.

DEDICATION

In memory of my father
Raymond G Shannon
(1931-2004)

"It's all out there"

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

While most Canadians live in a family¹, the structure of the family is undergoing dramatic changes. Once the dominant family form, the traditional nuclear family² now occupies a position alongside a variety of household arrangements. One-parent, stepparent, binuclear, common-law, and same-sex families are increasingly becoming the experience in the lives of children and parents. Indeed, recent data indicates that over half of all families in Canada today are nontraditional in structure (Statistics Canada, 2001).³ This changing profile of the family is due to a number of factors⁴, but one of the most influential is the increased incidence of divorce. Estimates vary, but it is generally predicted that four out of ten marriages⁵ in Canada will end in divorce (Statistics Canada, 2001).⁶ While the various ways divorce rates are computed and presented are potentially misleading one thing is clear: today, children and their parents are more likely to experience a restructuring of their family than any other time in modern history.

The large number of families who have, and potentially will, experience divorce has generated public as well as research and clinical concerns over the consequences of divorce. A voluminous body of research exists regarding how divorce is distressful for children (see Amato, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991a⁷; Amato & Keith 1991b⁸; Reifman et al., 2001⁹). Likewise, there is significant research on how divorce impacts mothers (Demo & Acock, 1996; Flowers,

Schneider & Ludke, 1996).¹⁰ However, much less attention has been given to the impact of divorce on fathers. In particular, research is almost absent on, perhaps, the most distressing issue facing divorced fathers: losing contact with their children.¹¹

Research suggests that caring involvement from both parents meets the best interests of children, whether from a divorced or nondivorced family (Bauserman, 2002; Kelly, 2000; Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Although fathers are no less capable and committed to their children's well being than are most mothers (Dienhart, 1998; Geiger, 1996) they are not considered equal to mothers in our society. Portrayals of fathers in the media demean fatherhood by presenting men as "naturally" inferior to women as parents (Lehman, 2000; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Moore, 1992) while at the same time portraying motherhood in over idealized ways (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Warshak, 1992). Indeed, if fathers desire contact with their children, their motives are often viewed as being about power and money rather than an actual parental relationship with their child.

Fathers' rights groups claim to act in the best interests of their children. This is often not the case. Child custody has become such a hot topic for many men because it is about money and power, as well as about who is looking after the children. (Ontario Women's Network On Child Custody And Access (OWNCCA), November 2002).¹²

Although such beliefs are not supported by research, these misconceptions have had tragic consequences for divorced fathers and are perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the standard divorce agreement. In Canada, mothers are awarded sole custody in nearly 50% of divorce settlements;

fathers are awarded sole custody in less than 8% of cases (Statistics Canada, 2001). Although joint custody accounts for approximately 40% of settlements, the mother is typically awarded primary care and residence (Statistics Canada, 2001).¹³ While these arrangements do not necessarily preclude a significant involvement of fathers in their children's lives, most fathers end up seeing very little of their children. Courts tend to relegate fathers to secondary caregivers, usually restricting their involvement to alternate weekend "visits" with scattered vacation times (Fathers 4 Justice - Canada, 2004; Kruk, 1992). Over time this amount drops dramatically to where most fathers end up seeing very little of their children (Furstenberg & Cherlkin, 1991; Kruk 1993).¹⁴ Eventually for some, contact is lost altogether.

This social and legal demeaning of fatherhood has been largely ignored and, until recently, unchallenged in society. As a result, popular misconceptions abound—"deadbeat dads" and "distant fathers"—that suggest divorced fathers prefer to have minimal or no contact with their children and must be legally compelled to meet their financial obligations to their children while mothers struggle to make ends meet.¹⁵ The research, however, paints an entirely different picture. The overwhelming majority of fathers fully meet their financial obligations to their children¹⁶; those that don't are usually men with low or no incomes (Bender & Brannon, 1994; Mandel, 1995). Most mothers lose about 20%-25% of the income they had access to before divorce compared to 10%-20% for fathers (Stroup & Pollock, 1994). Because most divorced women remarry they tend to regain a standard of living comparable to what they had before their

divorce (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1994). In contrast, financial responsibilities to the former wife and children preclude most remarried men providing as high a standard of living to their new family (Bender & Brannon, 1994).

But perhaps the most damaging misconception about fathers is the extent to which men suffer after a divorce. Society, in general, pays scant attention to how men fare after a divorce (Nielsen, 1999). Indeed, their feelings, needs, and desires as parents are too often minimized by a legal system that essentially says what children need most from their fathers is their money, not their involvement (Friedman, 1994) and by a therapeutic community that tends to downplay or ignore the plight of fathers (Long, 1997). Contrary to popular belief, though, these fathers do suffer. Fathers are more likely than mothers to become depressed, overly anxious, and develop stress-related illnesses (Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). Tragically, fathers are also more likely to commit suicide after their divorce (Kposowa, 2000). While they probably suffer so, in part, because they are reluctant to tell others how they are coping or seek help¹⁷, the societal, legal, and therapeutic beliefs and actions about divorced fathers demeans and marginalizes them, leaving many vulnerable to the problems noted above.

Purpose of the Study

Perhaps not surprisingly, the body of research on the effects of divorce has not given much attention to the experience of fathers, let alone those who have lost contact with their children altogether. Indeed, a search done on Dissertation Abstract International as well as on PsycINFO and other related information bases revealed no discernable studies on fathers who have lost contact with their

children. Their voices are missing.¹⁸ This study, though, addresses this vacuum and provides an opportunity where their voices can be heard. The purpose of this study, then, is to explore and describe the lived experiences of fathers who have lost contact with their children. Through a hermeneutic process of “mindful-reflective” listening to their stories the researcher entered into a collaborative dialogue with a small group of fathers and, in turn, conveys to the reader their experience of losing contact with their children after divorce. It is a study as I have come to see it, and of fathers who have experienced it, of “becoming childless.”

Significance of the Study

The preceding discussion illustrates that, overall, fathers have been unfairly treated legally and, arguably, socially with regards to their parental rights. As well, the research on their experiences, especially of losing contact with their children, is lacking. This study is a step towards redressing this social/legal imbalance and research omission. It is envisioned that the sharing of these fathers’ experiences will sensitize and inform legal, therapeutic, and research communities as well as the general public about the importance of fatherhood to fathers who are divorced. Reducing the impediments—legal and social—for fathers to have meaningful relationships with their children benefits everyone. We have far to go, but with insight into the lived experience of these fathers a new understanding may emerge, one that fosters compassion and support to fathers—as we do to children and mothers—as they too struggle with the changes to their family and, hence, their lives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Social Construction of Fatherhood

- The “New” Fatherhood in Canada

The parental roles of men and women are not ordained by human nature, biology, or psychology. Rather, they are the product of particular historical circumstances and vary widely by culture, class, ideology, religion, and race. Far from being a fixed category, then, fatherhood is a social-historical construct (Hacking, 1999). The social definition and meaning of fatherhood has dramatically changed over the past few centuries. And not surprisingly, this varied construct is still evolving in today’s rapidly changing world.

Early attempts to understand the history of fatherhood have often painted a simplistic either-or or before-after picture. For example, before the industrial revolution family life was seen as rural, fathers worked on farms or as craftsmen near the family home, they spent a lot of time with their children, and were the moral compass for the family. After the industrial revolution, though, family life was seen as urban, fathers worked in factories, did not spend very much time with their children, and mothers became the moral compass of the family. While there is undoubtedly some truth to these perceptions of fatherhood, detailed historical studies have shown that many forms of fatherhood coexisted (Demos, 1986).

The social history of fatherhood, then, is a vast and complex topic, full of debate and contradictions. Indeed, it has been argued that the history and pre-

history of fatherhood is incomplete and is still being written (Demos, 1986). Needless to say, it is too vast and complex to examine in any great detail here. For the purposes of this study, therefore, I have decided to narrow the historical aspect of fatherhood to a very generalized look at the emergence in the late 1970's and early 1980's of the "new father" in Canada and indeed the rest of industrial western society. It is this definition and meaning of fatherhood that has had the greatest impact on the fathers in this study.

The latter half of the twentieth century has arguably seen the most significant changes in the notion of the modern father. After World War II there was a growing belief that improper mothering or fathering could have truly disastrous consequences for children's emotional and psychological well-being. A particular concern at that time was father absence. Children growing up without a father present were deemed to be particularly susceptible to sexual promiscuity among girls and homosexuality and delinquency among boys. Childrearing experts called on fathers to become friends with their sons, play sports and hobbies with them, provide them with sex education, and serve as models of masculinity. However, they did not expect fathers to change diapers or take an active role in childcare or housework, arguing that this would make it difficult for boys and girls to develop a clearly defined sex role identity (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988; Griswold, 1993).

The 1960's and 1970's saw a dramatic increase in the divorce rate throughout much of the western world with the introduction of "no fault" divorce. As well, the large numbers of women who left the home and sought

employment in the workforce challenged the long-standing notion that a father was the breadwinner and, hence, the “head of the household.” Women were becoming viewed as not only capable of providing emotionally for their children, but financially as well. This shift in the maternal family role placed new pressures on the family to emotionally care for the children. The mother alone did not have the time and energy to work as well as care for the children.

During the late 1970’s a new picture of fatherhood began to emerge. The notion of the “new father” materialized. The man who made the conscious effort to leave work early and be with his children at home was moving into the social consciousness. This new father provided not only guidance to his children but was also an equal partner to his wife and helped with the practical aspects of childrearing that had once been the sole domain of the mother. This picture of a nurturing, caring and emotionally involved father was herald and portrayed in magazines, television and in the movies (Griswold, 1993).

Many fathers welcomed this change. Indeed, for many men and women this new role of the father would seem to have reached a more balanced and positive place. A “golden age” of paternity was at hand. One would not have been remiss, in fact, in believing that father’s roles were indeed equal to that of mothers.

Despite this perception of parental equality, however, fathers were being pushed further and further to the periphery during the 1990’s as was evidenced by child custody and access legislation as well as child support legislation.

The Social de-Construction of Fatherhood

- Child Custody in Canada

The history of child custody in Canada can trace its early legislation back to the days when it was a British colony and followed British Common Law. During these early years of colonialism, this common law held a longstanding presumption that, “the father was considered the parent naturally endowed to have custody of the children” (Macdonald, 1986). Indeed, it was not until the Industrial Revolution that new legislation was introduced to common law in the form of the *Talfourd's Act* in 1839 that women were even given the opportunity to petition for custody of their children. At that time, two conditions were recognized as a possible basis for a father not receiving custody of his child or children: physical child abuse and the specific wishes of the children. Though preference was still given to fathers, it was now possible for a woman to at least attempt to gain custody of her children under the law (MacDonald, 1986).

The trend toward allowing women custody steadily increased into the early twentieth century. By the 1920's the tide seemed to have shifted substantially, with more mothers than fathers being granted custody of children for the first time. The law was determining women and not men as the parent of preference. Importantly, this shift was not due to a change in specific legislation but was being determined within the courts themselves and this gradually became legal custom (MacDonald, 1986).

Judges were making the decision of which parent a child would reside with after divorce based upon what is referred to as the “tender years doctrine”

maternal preference (Crean, 1998). This doctrine was brought about not because women were deemed better or more natural than men to look after children, but because of a number of intersecting social influences. First, the industrial revolution had separated home and work by gender and most men were required to work in factories and not at home. No longer at home, the responsibility to care for their children increasingly fell into the mother's hands. Second, concerns about the exploitative nature of child labour mounted as the industrialization of economies grew. By the early 1900's it was seen that children needed protection and guidance. The "child-saving" movement initiated in large part by the women's movement made the safety and care of children an issue (the "tender years") and within that emerged the issue of the custody of children. It is within this context that the courts increasingly made custody determinations in favour of mothers.

The next major development in child custody in Canada occurred with the Divorce Act of 1968. This new federal divorce law established that custody should be assigned based upon "the best interest of the child" instead of the "tender years doctrine" which largely favoured maternal custody. The act now provided for joint custody and assumed that it was in a child's best interest to maintain an unencumbered relationship with both parents after divorce.

This change in custody legislation occurred within the context of powerful social changes. During the 1970's fathers began taking a more active role in raising their children as mothers were going back to work or back to school. At the same time, most industrial countries experienced an increase in marriage

dissolutions with the passing of “no fault” divorces. However, divorced fathers had no legal right to custody of their children unless the mother agreed to it. Traditional parental roles were being challenged, but the “tender years doctrine” still favoured a mother having custody of children after divorce. Slowly the legal treatment of divorce and child custody shifted from the preference for mothers to have sole custody—the “tender years presumption”—to the preference for joint custody—the “best interests of the child”—presumption.

Joint custody based upon this best interest of the child was seen as an effective way of handling the problem of who gets custody. Instead, however, it increased the quantity and intensity of divorce disputes as parents vehemently disagreed over the numerous custodial arrangements now possible. Joint custody based on “the best interest of the child” would presume that both parents should be permitted to have equal time with their children following separation, unless there is some very good reason why they should not—for example, if one parent is physically or sexually abusive, or alcoholic, or drug-addicted. In other words, there should be a rebuttable presumption in favour of joint custody, with equal time for both parents

In reality, though, joint custody accounts for only 40% of settlements in Canada and within these the primary residence is typically awarded to the mother (Statistics Canada, 2001); in nearly half of all cases mothers are awarded sole custody (Statistics Canada, 2001). And as mentioned previously, fathers are usually restricted to two weekend visits every month with scattered vacation times (Fathers 4 Justice - Canada, 2004). Thus, it would appear as if the “tender

years doctrine"—which presumes that by virtue of the fact that a woman was the mother of a child and, therefore, must be the superior parent—is still largely in practice. Why, many fathers ask, is this still the case?

- Child Support In Canada

As with child custody, the history of child support in Canada can trace its early legislation back to the days when it was a British colony and followed British Common Law. The British Poor Relief Act was in effect as Canada was colonized. It deemed the parents and grandparents of children were responsible for their maintenance. The first Canadian maintenance act—the Custody of Infants Act—was enacted in the mid-1800's and allowed mothers to petition for maintenance. This was followed shortly afterwards by legislation allowing mothers of illegitimate children to sue the father for support.

Little changed in the legislation of child maintenance until the 1980's. Because of the rising divorce rates in the 1970's concerns were expressed during the 1980's that divorce was a major cause of poverty for women and children. Special interest groups pointed to examples of inadequate child support awards as causing more and more women and children to live in poverty. In the 1990's the federal and provincial governments set out to address this concern by developing a set of guidelines that linked the non-custodial parent's income to the amount of child support they must pay. The argument was that by increasing child support payments poverty would be lessened. This effort culminated in 1997 with the Federal Child Support Guidelines.

While on the surface this would appear to be a reasonable and equitable endeavour—to equalize the financial consequences of divorce—some of the research it is based upon is seriously flawed and has hurt non-custodial fathers who must make, what many consider to be, unfair and inequitable child support payments.

The move towards increasing child support payments is largely based upon the research of American sociologist Lenore Weitzman. In her study, she claimed that a woman's standard of living decreased on average by 73% after divorce, whereas a man's standard of living increased by an average of 42% (Weitzman, 1985). Although Weitzman's findings are based upon U.S. research, the developers of the Federal Child Support Guidelines hailed her work as evidence that divorce causes economic losses for women and economic gains for men and that this inequity was best addressed by increasing support payments overall.

Peterson (1996), however, re-analyzed Weitzman's research and found her change in average living standard to be in significant error; however, he agreed that men's standard of living tends to slightly increase and women's standard of living tends to slightly decrease; just not nearly as much as originally reported by Weitzman. Peterson also pointed out that Weitzman's results seriously distorted public policy regarding child support. Indeed, a 1993 report to Parliament quotes Weitzman's findings as "...equally observable in Canada and for many of the same reasons." (Douglas, 1993)

In another study, however, Braver and O'Connell (1998) challenged the child expenditure assumptions Weitzman used in determining standard of living (something Peterson's research did not). For example, a typical access/visitation arrangement with half of weekends and half of holidays would result in a parent having a child approximately 20% of the time, something Weitzman did not consider. Taking into account this and other errors of child expenditures, in their study they found that men and women had similar standards of living after divorce.

According to Millar and Gauthier (2000), the flaws in Weitzman's study pointed out by Peterson and Braver and O'Connell have produced a formula currently used by the Guidelines that is inherently unfair and inequitable. No consideration is given to the support-receiving parent's income. No consideration is likewise given to the remarriage of the support-receiving parent. Finally, no consideration is given to the ability of the support-paying parent's ability to meet their child's needs while in their care (e.g., weekends, vacation and holiday times). Despite the fact that none of the key assumptions that underlie the Child Support Guidelines are based on fact and that Weitzman has acknowledged these issues it continues to be used in determining child support.

The Child Support Guidelines, then, tends to place a financial burden on the support-paying parent (usually the father). To many, it provides not only child support, but also spousal support in the end. Because the vast majority of custody settlements are awarded to mothers or they have primary residence, it is

fathers who pay the price of providing for equitable living standards that are in reality inequitable.

As previously mentioned, if joint custody's "best interest of the child" is the guiding factor in today's child custody arrangements then why are not most children sharing residences with both parents? Likewise, if money was the primary issue in "the best interest of the child" then why do not children simply reside with that parent from the outset?

- Parental Alienation Syndrome

As previously mentioned, by the mid-1970's the legal treatment of divorce shifted from the preference of mothers to have sole custody to the preference for joint custody. Rather than providing a vehicle for divorced parents to jointly raise their children, however, it appeared to increase the quantity and intensity of divorce disputes as both parents disagreed over custodial arrangements.

By the early 1980's there was a disturbing trend emerging in divorce/custody disputes. In particular, false allegations of abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, or a fabricated history of spousal abuse, became commonplace. Indeed, according to U.S. statistics compiled by the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect (1988), non-valid reports outnumbered cases of *bona fide* abuse by a ratio of two to one.

At the same time, another, perhaps far sinister, trend was emerging. A number of fathers were commenting on how their children became estranged from them after divorce. To them, it made little sense; prior to divorce they got along well with their children, but gradually their children did not want to see

them. Granted, while some children become estranged from a parent for bona fide reasons (e.g., sexual and physical abuse; neglect), there were enough stories from them that merited serious consideration of these fathers' concerns. Indeed, the American Bar Association Section of Family Law to commission a large scale study of the problem. The results of this 12-year study were published in a book called "Children Held Hostage" (Clawar & Rivlin, 1991).

It was the work of Dr. Richard Gardner, however, who brought this trend to the public as well as legal and therapeutic communities attention. Gardner was an experienced child and forensic psychiatrist. From his extensive clinical work with children and families during the 1970's he knew that the norm for children of divorce was to continue to love and long for both parents, in spite of the divorce and the passage of years; a finding replicated by one of the first large scale studies of divorce (Wallerstein, 1985). By the early 1980's Gardner became concerned about the increasing number of divorce children he was seeing who, especially in the course of custody evaluations, presented as preoccupied with denigrating one parent, sometimes to the point of expressing hatred toward a once loved parent.

Parental Alienation Syndrome was coined by Gardner to refer to the child's symptoms of denigrating and rejecting a previously loved parent in the context of divorce. Gardner defined Parental Alienation Syndrome as, "a relationship disturbance in which the children are not merely systematically and consciously brainwashed, are also subconsciously and unconsciously

programmed by one parent against the other." (1992). Gardner stated that this process occurred to some degree in 90% of all custody conflicts (1992).¹⁹

According to Gardner, the brainwashing component in PAS can be more or less conscious on the part of the programming parent and may be systematic or subtle. The child's active contributions to the campaign of denigration may help to create and maintain a mutually reinforcing feedback loop between the child and the programming parent. The child's contributions notwithstanding, Gardner views the alienating parent as the responsible adult who elicits or transmits a negative set of beliefs about the target parent. The child's loving experiences with the target parent in the past are replaced with a new reality, the negative scenario shared by the programming parent and child that justifies their rejection of the alienated parent. In light of these observations, Gardner warned that statements of children in divorce/custody about rejecting one parent should not be taken at face value and should be evaluated for PAS dynamics. This insight is one of Gardner's most important contributions because it alerted the legal system, parents and mental health professionals dealing with divorce to an important possibility that can have disastrous effects if unrecognized.

It is important to note that Gardner distinguishes between Parental Alienation Syndrome and the term "parental alienation." There are a wide variety of causes for parental alienation, including bona fide parental abuse and/or neglect, as well as significant deficits in a rejected parent's functioning that may not rise to the level of abuse. From Gardner's perspective, a diagnosis of PAS

only applies where abuse, neglect and other conduct by the alienated parent, which would reasonably justify the alienation, are relatively minimal.

Gardiner lists eight primary symptoms of the PAS:

1. A campaign of denigration in which the child actively denigrates the alienated parent.
2. Weak, frivolous, or absurd rationalizations for the denigration.
3. A lack of ambivalence in which the child sees one parent as all good and the other as all bad.
4. The child asserts that the decision not to see the alienated parent is his/her own, what Gardner refers to as the "independent-thinker" phenomenon.
5. Blind support of the alienating parent.
6. An absence of guilt over the denigration of the alienated parent.
7. The presence of borrowed scenarios, i.e., the child's statements reflect the alienating parent's terminology.
8. The spread of animosity to the extended family and friends of the alienated parent.

According to Gardner, it is important to differentiate between mild, moderate, or severe PAS, as these classifications determine what court orders and therapeutic interventions should be made.²⁰ In mild cases—the least common form—there is some parental alienation, but visitation is not seriously effected and the child manages the transition between parents without too much difficulty. The child has a reasonably healthy relationship with the target parent,

although participates in the campaign of denigration to maintain the primary emotional bond with the programming parent. The courts affirming that the preferred parent will retain primary custody can usually alleviate mild PAS.

The most common PAS level, according to Gardner, is moderate. In moderate PAS, there is a significant degree of parental alienation, along with significant struggles around visitation. The child often has difficulty transitioning between homes, but is eventually able to settle down and become benevolently involved with the target parent he or she is visiting. The bond between the programming parent and child is still reasonably healthy, despite their shared conviction that the target parent is somehow less than desirable. At this level, stronger legal interventions might be required and a court ordered PAS therapist recommended who can monitor visits and report to the court regarding failures to implement visitation. The threat of sanctions against the programming parent may be needed to gain compliance. Failure to apply the appropriate level of court orders and therapeutic interventions in moderate PAS may put the child at risk for developing severe PAS. In some moderate cases, after court-ordered special therapy and sanctions have failed, Gardner states that it may be necessary to seriously consider transferring custody to the target parent, assuming that parent is fit. In some situations, this is the only hope of protecting the child from progression to the severe category.

Finally, there is severe PAS where the child is adamant in his or her hatred of the target parent. The child may refuse to visit, personally make false allegations of abuse, and threaten to run away, or harm themselves or others if

forced to see the target parent. Programming parent and child have a pathological bond, often based on shared paranoid beliefs about the target parent. In severe PAS, Gardner has found that if the child is allowed to stay with the programming parent the relationship with the target parent is doomed and the child develops long-standing psychopathology. Assuming the target parent is fit, Gardner believes that the only effective remedy in severe PAS is to give custody to the alienated parent with provisions for a therapeutic transitional placement such as hospitalization.

A Canadian researcher, Glen Cartwright of McGill University, has argued that Gardner's research provides an accurate picture of what happens in Canadian divorced families.

Parental Alienation Syndrome is extremely serious, and I am using very strong language here. It's nothing less than the symbolic killing of the non-custodial parent in the life of a child. It not only kills the non-custodial parent; it kills the grandparents and the aunts, the uncles, the friends and so on. One half of the child's family disappears from view and the child is not able to grieve that loss. (Cartwright, 1998)

Sadly, even if the alienated child seeks to re-establish contact with the alienated parent and his family, they may be facing insurmountable odds. Cartwright points out that the lost parent may be unable or unwilling to become reinvolved. Likewise, other relatives may feel as if they could ever trust the child. The parent or grandparents, too, may have died. Some of these children may eventually turn against the alienating parent, but if the target parent is lost to them as well the child is left with an unfillable void.

The concept of Parental Alienation Syndrome—how to assess it; how to treat it—has ignited intense debate in the legal and mental health communities.

Regardless, the Parental Alienation Syndrome is expected to be included in the next edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (i.e., DSM-V). This will provide psychologists and expert witnesses with more authority with regard to their recommendations how to deal with divorced families experiencing this.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH PARADIGM

Philosophical Foundation

All research is guided—consciously or unconsciously—by a set of fundamental theoretical assumptions, often referred to as a paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). These assumptions—what is the nature of reality or knowledge (ontology), what is the relationship between the researcher and knowledge (epistemology), and how the researcher should go about finding this knowledge (methodology)—are intrinsically connected to the research strategy or plan of action from inception to completion. Indeed, research can be understood as arising from a particular paradigm that provides the context for the study's theoretical perspective that, in turn, shapes the choice of methodology. Before research is conducted, then, it is imperative that the researcher articulate as clearly as possible what paradigm informs the theoretical perspective, why that particular theoretical perspective is best suited to address the research question, and that the research methodology chosen is logically consistent and congruent with both the paradigm's and theoretical perspective's principles.

Until quite recently, the "positivistic" paradigm reigned supreme in social science research (for a detailed review of its origins, development and approach to human science see Polkinghorne, 1983).²¹ Positivism holds the view that in order for the social sciences to be considered a legitimate science it should emulate the natural or physical sciences by offering measured causal explanations of human behaviour. This approach is based on realist assumptions

of the natural sciences: that a singular reality external to the observer exists and operates according to natural laws (realist ontology), that the researcher must position himself objectively—"value free"—in order to not contaminate the comprehension of that reality (objectivist epistemology), and that this reality can be quantifiably measured and hence predicted and controlled (experimental methodology).

Positivistic research has, arguably, provided valuable information about the human condition. However, a number of issues with this approach have seriously questioned its efficacy at capturing the lived experience of life and the meanings human beings attach to these experiences.²² This shortcoming has fostered a different research paradigm to emerge—albeit slowly and also not without criticism—which is oriented towards understanding the world of lived experience from the viewpoint of those who actually live it. This "qualitative" or "naturalistic" approach is able to do so because of ontological and epistemological beliefs that direct the methodology in significantly different ways than positivism. Within this paradigm there are multiple realities—not just one—dependant for their form and content on the persons who hold them (relativistic ontology), the discovery of these realities and knowledge are the creation of an interaction—not a distancing—between the researcher and those being researched (subjectivist epistemology), and the understanding of these realities involves the analysis of descriptions or discourse (phenomenological or interpretive methodology).

Despite considerable criticism the increasing presence of published qualitative research and journals devoted to this approach have established it as a bona fide research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Indeed, qualitative work has become firmly established in education, nursing, social work, sociology and anthropology²³, and psychology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kidd, 2002; Krahn et al., 1995; Lee et al., 1999; Rennie, 1999; Rogers, 2000). The ongoing evolution of this research paradigm has spawned a number of theoretical perspectives fashioned to suit the particular context of a research question (for an overview of these see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). While differences between these theoretical approaches can have significant implications at the methodological level they all endeavour to make sense of the experiences of human beings and the meanings people bring to them. And it is within this qualitative philosophical context that the study's theoretical framework—hermeneutics—(to be discussed below) seeks to address the present research question.

Theoretical Perspective

As mentioned above, the qualitative approach is an umbrella for a number of related yet distinct theoretical approaches to describing the lived experience of human beings. While there are a number of orientations to which I could turn to explicate the experience of fathers who have lost contact with their children after the dissolution of their marriage or common-law relationship, I have chosen the hermeneutic approach. In the following I will outline why hermeneutics is an appropriate theoretical strategy to address the study's research question.

Hermeneutics refers to the art and practice of interpretation. The word hermeneutics itself is derived from the Greek verb meaning “to interpret” (hermeneuo), which is derived from the name of the Greek god Hermes, who interpreted and conveyed messages from the gods to mortals (Mavromataki, 1997). Until the end of the nineteenth century, scholars have used the term hermeneutics to refer to the rules governing the interpretation of what an author of a text was attempting to communicate from their historical/cultural standpoint or situation. The ancient Greeks used hermeneutics as a technique for interpreting legends, stories, and historical texts (Kneller, 1984). Biblical and Rabbinical scholars have employed a hermeneutical approach in their interpretation of religious texts and scriptures (Steinsaltz, 1989). Finally, legal scholars and the courts have used it in applying laws to legal cases (Dallmayr & McCarthy, 1977).

In recent years there has been a growing interest in what has been called “interpretive social science” (Schwandt, 2000) and the application of hermeneutics beyond the interpretation of literature, theological, and judicial writings. The current hermeneutical approach has developed from the phenomenological works of Edmund Husserl with critical elaborations by Martin Heidegger and the hermeneutic turn of Heidegger’s work by Hans-Georg Gadamer.²⁴ Phenomenology is central to the development of modern hermeneutics and, therefore, it is important to review it briefly (for a detailed look at phenomenology the reader is directed to Polkinghorne, 1983).²⁵

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is often credited with the founding of the phenomenological movement. Husserl's work marks a significant departure from the epistemological assumptions underlying a positivistic-based human science. The then-dominant philosophy of positivism claimed that knowledge or reality existed primarily outside human consciousness (as noted before, a realist ontology) and was acquired by a passive, independent consciousness that more or less objectively perceived and analyzed objects and actions (as previously noted, an objectivist epistemology). Husserl, however, questioned whether the relationship between perception and its objects and actions was passive. For Husserl, consciousness actively constitutes objects of experience or what he called phenomena. Knowledge, then, did not exist a priori to awareness; it is a constitutive product of this activity of consciousness (subjectivist epistemology).

Like the positivist, however, Husserl believed there was a "true" or "pure" essence or structure of the objects of experience that antedated the consciousness' construction of it (realist ontology). According to Husserl, though, what people experienced in everyday awareness was not this true essence, but the end result of the constitutive processes within consciousness. However, Husserl believed it was possible to grasp the pure form of phenomena by engaging in the intuitive processes of "bracketing" and "reduction." Bracketing entailed setting aside one's presuppositions (conditioned ways of knowing) about the nature of the phenomenon and continually doing so—the process of reduction—allowed consciousness to transcend seeing things as they appear to seeing things as they truly are, in other words, its pure form. Once in this state,

phenomenological description can take place and phenomena is presented without interpretation. Accordingly, because phenomena have a true or universal essence theoretically two or more researchers using the above intuiting methodology should be able to discern the same description of it.

Phenomenology, then, is the "eidetic" grasping and description of the essences of phenomena.²⁶

Martin Heidegger's work (1889-1976) marks the beginning of a significant challenge to the realist ontology of positivism as well as Husserl. At one time a pupil of Husserl, Heidegger questioned Husserl's image of human knowledge. Heidegger did not believe in either Husserl's attempt to achieve presuppositionless knowing through the processes of bracketing and reduction until the pure meaning of phenomena was revealed or, indeed, in the "pure truth" that Husserl argued was intuited from this process. For Heidegger, presuppositionless was impossible for human beings were inseparable from the world of being. To be human, according to Heidegger, was to always be interpretive. Humans make sense of their world from their interpretation within it, not from some detached way by methods that somehow provide a "purity of thought" that then describe a "pure form." Instead, knowledge occurs in an engagement of the world, what Heidegger referred to as "Dasein" meaning "being-there." Because the relationship between knowledge and the knower were inseparable there could be no single, definitive, pure explanation. Rather, there are many interpretations (a relativistic ontology).

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) took Heidegger's ideas one very important step further by showing how understanding is hermeneutical. Because interpretation of human action always occurs within a particular historical/socio-political context (which is itself always undergoing change) and interpreters do not exist independent of this, interpretation is always temporal and in process. In other word, there is never a final or "correct" interpretation. Understanding, then, is not something that can be arrived at by reducing or eliminating one's preconceptions or prejudices. Nor is it reproduced or discovered by grasping a noetic meaning of something "out there." Rather, it is negotiated between the interpreter and the subject of interpretation against the backdrop of the interpreter's particular historical/socio-political context, what Gadamer referred to as the "fusion of the horizons." And, importantly, it is through language that our being-in-the-world is expressed, interpreted, and understood.

This hermeneutic turn by Gadamer represents a significant departure from other qualitative approaches. While all qualitative approaches have their antecedents in the movement away from the positivist paradigm, hermeneutics is unique in that it is the clearest, perhaps the most honest, about the fact it is constructing a "reality" on the basis of the interpreter's interpretation of the data with the help of the participants who provided the data in the study. In other words, it is explicit in that there is a dialectical epistemological relationship between the interpreter and the object of interpretation, but in the end it is still an interpretation, not a description. It is this frankness and honesty about who is

determining what constitutes reality, is what appeals to me as a researcher.²⁷ Although I have personally experienced "becoming childless" I cannot purport that I know how to exactly describe what other such father's have experienced. At best, I can only give my interpretation through my particular historicity of what they have experienced through their interpretations of that experience. I sincerely believe that this is the best we can offer in an understanding of someone's lived experience. For this reason and the reasons noted above I have chosen hermeneutics as the theoretical framework from which to explore the lived experiences of fathers who have lost contact with their children.

Researcher's Context

Increasingly in qualitative research there is a call for the visible inclusion of the author in research, providing insight into how the researcher's socio-historicity has shaped their construction of participants' lived experiences. The author's voice is no longer considered something that must be hidden, managed or generally set-aside in order to provide an objective accounting. Qualitative research, and in particular hermeneutics, sees inherited biases as something not to be avoided but actually embraced. It does not believe it is desirable, let alone even possible, to separate the self from the research. In hermeneutical-oriented research, by acknowledging one's own prejudices, those that impede an understanding of others can be challenged and revised as necessary, what is referred to in hermeneutics as the "fusion of horizons."²⁸

Having said this, then, it is important to elucidate the major assumptions one has about aspects of the research project that may be challenged during the

course of the research. By laying out one's historical knowledge base, one's "horizon," this writer hopes to "fuse" this with the voices of the study to better achieve an understanding of their lived experience.

The following, then, are the five major assumptions I hold with respect to knowledge and meaning in general:

1. There is no absolute or inherent meaning in life.²⁹
2. As a result, human beings are always interpreting their world so that they can understand it and themselves. We are inseparable from doing so as it is our primordial being in the world, our ontological dilemma.
3. All interpretation is historically and socially situated. Those who describe their experience cannot separate themselves from their sociohistorical situation.
4. Interpretations will never be unproblematic. Human beings use language to convey to each other who they are, their experience of life, and their understanding of one another. Language, however, will never be a direct representation of lived experience as there are many ways to express that experience and, conversely, interpret that expression.
5. Interpretations are also problematic because they exist within a political, economic, and social context that often promotes or favours one interpretation over another.

The following six items are assumptions I hold about the process of research in general:

1. Research is an act of interpretation. The meaning of someone's lived experience can never be fully understood by the researcher as the researcher's perceptions themselves are an act of interpretation.
2. There is no final interpretation. Interpretation is an evolving process.
3. Research is never neutral as it is located in a political, economic, and social context. The researcher is situated within this and therefore these inevitably influence the research process and findings.
4. People who conduct and report research findings inevitably shape knowledge. Therefore, the researcher is obligated to ask whose interest the research serves.
5. A major goal of research is to help the disadvantaged, marginalized, or oppressed. The results of research should be made available to them.
6. The research relationship is vulnerable to power inequities. Thus, the researcher should strive for a non-hierarchical and collaborative approach with participants.

The last item illustrates the importance of reflecting upon one's general assumptions regarding research participants. Doing so can help facilitate the collaborative approach noted which ultimately provides a better understanding of their experiences and the meanings they make from it. Drawing upon my own experience as a therapist, there are six core assumptions I hold about those I engage in "understanding" conversations. They are:

1. I respect the capacity of individuals to reflect upon and describe their lived experience.
2. I respect an individual's unique personal and cultural way of communicating their lived experiences. As a researcher (and therapist) it is my responsibility to understand them from their point of view.
3. I respect an individual's ability to freely choose what course of action they want to make in life. I do not presume to know what is "best" or "right" for them.

While the above third assumption states my belief in a person's freedom and ability to choose their course of actions, these choices do not occur in a vacuum. Just as interpretations are influenced by one's socio-historicity, so too are the choices one is able to make in one's life. People exist within various political and economic systems that differ in access to power and control. It follows, then, that if one's access is limited, the choices will also be limited compared to individuals who have greater access to power and control. Based upon this, my fourth and fifth beliefs regarding participants are:

4. All human beings exist within a larger culture and, within that, smaller sub-cultures. These groups are in a state of continuous competition for economic and political resources. The scarcity of any given resource dictates the level of competition and the outcome determines access to power both for individuals within the groups themselves and amongst competing groups at large.³⁰
5. Human beings do not willingly cooperate for the common good of all. It would be more accurate to say, humans will 'default' to a position of self-

preservation and personal gain at the expense of others and cooperate when it is in their best interest or are compelled to do so.³¹

These last two assumptions raise the important issue of how I perceive the present research within the broader social-political spectrum. Therefore, I am stating my belief that:

6. The socio-political environment which currently prevails is one in which the role of non-custodial fathers has been substantially diminished. Stereotypes surrounding them in general have been filled with harmful images and suggestions that have, by and large, worked to influence the opinions of the larger culture against them. Indeed, they are no longer considered necessary, valuable elements of their children's lives. Most importantly, however, the larger power structures within the North American culture(s) have reinforced these ideas by constructing and supporting policies that continue to force these fathers to the periphery of the larger culture. This is a form of oppression that should be challenged.

The aim of hermeneutical research is to best represent participant's lived experience in the inquiry. I believe it approximates this, perhaps better than any other theoretical approach, by its honesty and clarity about how it is the researcher who represents their voices and the process through which it achieves it. With this in mind, I have delineated my assumptions about core aspects of the present research with the hope that my own particular horizon will be open to those of the fathers of this study and thus achieve a fuller appreciation and understanding of their lived experience of "becoming childless."

Socio-Political Context

While qualitative researchers tend to be highly critical of positivism and reject the notion of a disengaged and objective research self, there is no universal agreement as to the purpose of the research. Simply put, is research merely knowledge generation or does it aim to challenge and change social conventions? In answering this question for myself I found myself continually returning to the question, "Why do people choose the topics they do for their research?" In my conversations with other dissertation researchers, the answer seemed almost invariably to be that they had a vested interest or personal stake in the research topic. It is certainly no different with this study. As I have stated, my belief and experience is that divorced fathers have been marginalized by mainstream society. However, I am not merely interested in "knowledge for knowledge's sake." In my opinion, a neutral research position will, at best, offer an interesting academic study and, at worst, simply maintain the status quo. Research that explores injustices in society either implicitly or explicitly seeks, as one of its purposes of inquiry, to change those injustices. My intentions are quite explicit: the social and legal injustices experienced by divorced fathers should be equitably reconstructed, not merely talked about.

This, then, places the proposed study into the socio-political realm. There are a number of theoretical approaches that examine undemocratic or oppressive social practices. For the purposes of this study, I believe Critical Theory offers an appropriate conceptual framework for father's voices to be understood within the larger socio-political arena.

Critical Theory has its origins in the 20th century Frankfurt School³² and is currently associated with scholars across a range of disciplines. While early Critical Theory research focused on the determinative nature of economic and political structures, recent work aspires to confront all unjust social systems and practices. As an approach it attempts to understand the complex relationship between social power structures (especially economic, political and legal) and how this creates and maintains the marginalization and, ultimately, oppression of certain groups. Furthermore, it aims for a transformative outcome. Critical researchers argue that the only way to address power inequality is through real and responsive political action. Any other course would simply maintain the status quo. Thus, they assume that the knowledge gained from their research will be used to achieve this end.

A Critical Theory approach would argue that a disadvantaged group—such as the fathers in this study—have become marginalized because their voices have been lost in the overshadowing din of those who control the power, whether they are structural (law courts and legislators) or social (commonly held beliefs). This situation is, in my opinion, true for many divorced fathers. If the current socio-political-legal environment supports policies that hinder the rights of fathers to have an equitable relationship with their children, as do mothers, then this inequity is deserving of a more critical examination, one that I believe Critical Theory would help situate.

Critical Theory shares a number of ontological and epistemological assumptions with qualitative-oriented research that help lend its incorporation into the present study. They are:

1. Both traditions are more interested in offering interpretations than in elucidating natural laws of causality.
2. Both traditions stress that meaning and language are socially constructed (although critical researchers are quick to point out that while interpretations may be constructed, forces of oppression are real in their consequences and, hence, may be understood as such).
3. Both question the problem of bias in research. Qualitative and, in particular, hermeneutic researchers argue that "bias" should be reconceptualized in light of the subjective position of the researcher which informs one's interpretation.
4. Both are interested in how meanings may remain the same or change over time.
5. Both are open to the possibility of social change.
6. Scholars in both traditions evaluate their arguments in light of a community of researchers of which they are a part.

Despite these commonalities, there is an important criticism that warrants attention. Because the main focus of Critical Theory research has tended to be on the role of power systems within a culture, for the most part their analyses fall into what Anthropologists term the "etic" realm. This way of conducting research distances the voice of those being affected by the power systems and assumes the researcher understands what the problems are and how they should

be addressed. This elitist approach to studying power structures has been challenged by modern Anthropology which has opted instead for an “emic” approach; one where power structures are understood from the perspective—voices of—those most adversely affected by oppressive policies and the status quo. While employing a Critical Theory approach, then, does not necessarily mean that the voices of those affected by oppressive power structures and policies are lost, qualitative researchers utilizing this perspective must be vigilant in maintaining as their focus the actual participants who have been marginalized and oppressed.

This theoretical orientation is in keeping with my view that research that examines inequality should be put into practice for those who would benefit most from it. As I have previously stated, I believe the current socio-political climate fosters the marginalization of divorced fathers regarding their role as parents and, hence, involvement with their children. Thus, while I listened to divorced fathers’ experiences of losing contact with their children I also listened for and explored their thoughts and feelings regarding how the present socio-political arena they live in has contributed to their experience. Critical Theory provides such a conceptual framework for doing so.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

- Co-researchers

Hermeneutic inquiry respects the capacity of individuals for self-knowing and their ability to give voice to their experiences. Skilfully conducted interviews can help facilitate this by asking questions that promote thoughtful reflection, exploration and insight into participants' lived experiences. While such interviews are instrumental at eliciting information-rich stories, in my opinion the most important factor contributing to participants sharing their private and privileged lives is the actual relationship between the researcher and participant—a relationship which is one of equality, collaboration and, ultimately, trust. Indeed, this stance is deeply embedded in the hermeneutic research tradition. Because interpretive research involves the researcher's interpretation of the interpretations being made by those who have had a particular experience, together—the researcher and the participant or co-researcher—construct the “reality” of that experience. The practice of equality and collaboration engenders a climate of trust between the researcher and participants and it is that quality that gives an opportunity for the open and deep exploration of participants' lived experiences.

In this study, as in my clinical practice, I sought to foster and maintain such a collaborative relationship with participants. How is this seemingly simple

yet difficult task achieved? First, I have learned largely through clinical experience that being able to hear others describe their lived experiences involves an awareness of one's inner dialogue of biases, presuppositions and prejudices which move one away from what is being said by others to what is simply being repeated by oneself. In other words, unless I "quiet" my mind and am "mindful" of what is being said by others I will continue to only hear and thus understand the research question from my biases, presuppositions and prejudices. Second, and again learned largely from my clinical experience, if one takes an "expert" position with others—that is, "I know what is happening for you more so than you do and so you should listen to what I have to say about that"—this is intuitively known by others as "elitist" and will not engender trust and the sharing of their inner world.

To foster a collaborative relationship with participants, then, I must be aware of how I am being interpreted by participants. My behaviour, whether implicit or explicit, will be a determining factor regarding just how much of these fathers' lived experience is shared with me. There are no simple formulas or answers for engendering trust. It is more of an art than science and is usually learned through many years of actual experience working with others who need to trust you in order to address their problems in life. Every client, every interview, is different and there is no guarantee that trust will occur. But believing in and practicing equality and collaboration with others as well as

being able to listen to what someone is saying without judgement or distraction can provide an opportunity for trust to develop.

- Inviting Participation

The method of choosing a sample in hermeneutic research is an important albeit challenging task. The underlying goal in selecting participants in hermeneutic research is to find individuals who can provide descriptions of their lived experience that will help illuminate an understanding of the research question. Given the real-world context in which it is conducted, hermeneutic research most often uses purposive sampling.³³ But just how one determines which participants can best represent the research question and how many participants are necessary is not clear-cut. To address this issue, Morse (1991) has identified two characteristics—appropriateness and adequacy—of a sample as a means to evaluate its quality in qualitative research.

Appropriateness. For Morse, an appropriate sample is one in which participants can provide full, rich, and vivid descriptions of their experience of the research topic. Furthermore, these participants must be willing to spend the necessary time to be interviewed. Meeting these criterion will help contribute to the researcher's understanding of that experience. With regards to the proposed study, then, the criteria for appropriateness was:

1. Divorced or common-law fathers who have experienced the loss of contact with their child(ren).

2. Divorced or common-law who have lost hope that they will ever see their child(ren) again.
3. The loss of contact with their child(ren) was not their choice.
4. Prior to losing contact with their child(ren) these fathers considered themselves fully involved in their child(ren)'s life.
5. Divorced or common-law fathers who are able to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding this loss.
6. Divorced or common-law fathers who can commit to participation in the study to its completion.

This sample was chosen by purposive sampling from volunteers interested in participating in the study. Specifically, I sought volunteers by contacting agencies and organizations in the Victoria area that have the potential to be in contact with such fathers. A brochure briefly outlining the study and describing participation criteria was made available. In addition to this potential source of participants, I contacted individuals known to me personally and asked them if they knew of any individuals who might be interested in participating. Again, I provided a brochure for their perusal. Interested participants were asked to contact me by telephone at which time they were provided an opportunity to discuss in greater detail the purpose of the study and the appropriateness of their inclusion. If I determined they met minimum sample criteria I then met with them and had a face-to-face interview to further determine their appropriateness to the study and to discuss any concerns or

questions they might have (e.g., confidentiality, time frame, interview structure, report audience). A final sample of four fathers was chosen from these interviews. It is my contention that this sample provided information-rich cases that illuminated the research question and, hence, met Morse's (1991) appropriateness criterion.

Adequacy. It is difficult to know beforehand in hermeneutical research how many participants will be required to meet the criterion of adequacy. It is my contention that the meaningfulness of this study is more a result of the information-rich quality of the cases selected and the interviewing/analyzing abilities of the researcher than a specific sample size. Morse (1991; 2000) similarly argues that an adequate sample size is one in which the quality of information attained answers the research question. A review of the literature on hermeneutical research suggests a ballpark figure of between 4-10 participants. The guiding principle for determining the actual size was the criterion of redundancy. As Morse (1998) notes, redundancy occurs when any more data does not provide any further insight to an understanding of the research question. Therefore, at any point I began to hear repetition of experiences with no new themes emerging I determined that the sample was adequate. For the purposes of this study I found the fourth participant's story to have saturated the data. While not without some weaknesses, endeavouring to meet Morse's (1991) criteria of adequacy and appropriateness helped select a sample that provided insight into divorced fathers' experience of losing contact with their children.

- Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are inherent in any study and are present throughout the research process. They are particularly salient in hermeneutic studies. Informants are asked to share their experiences, often very personal, intimate and, by nature, distressing. The researcher, too, is impacted as they are invited to enter a real lived world of another human being regarding an issue that, in all likelihood, they have a “heart-felt” affinity towards. The personal interaction between hermeneutic researchers and participants increases the attention that must be given to ethical issues. While it is not possible to foresee all potential ethical problems, foreknowledge of some of the ethical issues that can arise during research will help to sensitize a researcher to and, hopefully, respond to them in an appropriate and timely manner.

In particular, I have found Kvale’s (1996) overview of ethical issues at various stages of the research process helpful as a context for considering ethical choices during the proposed study. They are summarized as follows:

1. Thematizing. The purpose of the study should help to improve the human situation being investigated.
2. Designing. Participants must be fully informed of the study’s overall purpose and any possible risks and benefits from participation. Informed consent to participate in the study must be obtained with the right to withdraw at any time.

3. Interview Situation. The confidentiality of participants' reports need to be delineated as well as measures in place to ensure that participants are not left distressed after talking about sensitive topics.
4. Transcription. Again, the issue of confidentiality of reports must be addressed as well as what is transcribed is loyal to participants' oral statements.
5. Analysis and Verification. It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher that the interpretations made reflect the data that was obtained.
6. Reporting. Again, confidentiality must be assured when writing the report as well as the possible consequences for participants and the larger group whom they may be seen as representing of the published report.

To address these concerns, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to conducting interviews. The consent form signed by participants outlined the nature and purpose of the study, the intended research audience, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Informants' rights of confidentiality was ensured by assigning code numbers to each participant which was used to label audiotapes and transcripts of interviews. These codes were kept in a separate file in a separate secured file cabinet. Upon completion of the study, all identifying information, including consent forms for participation, was destroyed.

For the most part, participants experience interviews as positive experiences. Being able to give voice to one's lived experience, especially if it has had a profound effect upon one's life, can be rewarding. The highly personal and

intimate nature of hermeneutic interviews, however, can also engender upsetting thoughts and feelings as the interviewee reflects upon painful aspects of their lived experience. While such feelings are not uncommon and are perhaps to be expected, the researcher needs to be cognizant of the possible consequences of the interview process on informants. Researchers need to be sensitive to the questions that are asked, the tone of the interview, and the emotionality of the interviewee. Above all else, researchers need to ensure participants are not left distressed after talking about sensitive topics. Hence, following each interview I was available to debrief and provide support as necessary.

The ethical issues reviewed must be considered and addressed before the study commences to protect the rights and well being of participants. Ethical issues, however, are not restricted to the planning of a study for they arise throughout the entire research process. Unfortunately there are no definite answers to the choices a researcher must make during this process. Being aware of the above guidelines, though, helped ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner. In the end, however, it is the integrity of the researcher—their honesty, sensitivity, knowledge, and experience—which is the decisive factor.

Data Collection

- Interview Conversations

The information for this study was gathered through a series of interviews. The current interest in interview research (versus measurement research) reflects the growing recognition that social reality is constructed and

the medium for its construction is language, whether written or oral. The research interview is a conversation between two people about the respondent's understanding of this social construction of reality and how they have experienced it (Kvale, 1996). Hermeneutics, then, is especially relevant to interview research as it strives to understand the meaning individuals give to their experiences.

For the purposes of this study, I used a semi-structured interview technique (Bernard, 1994). This method of life story exploration exists somewhere between the casual atmosphere of the unstructured interview, where the researcher and participant engage in an exchange of ideas regarding an agreed upon topic but without pre-planned questions or direction, and the structured interview, where the participants are asked to respond to a set of pre-arranged questions and do not venture outside those parameters.

The advantage to the semi-structured interview is that it allows the researcher to introduce questions and issues that they may consider relevant and important to the study while still making available the space and flexibility for participants to lead the conversation and define the direction they would like to go while sharing their lived experiences (see Appendix E for list of potential interview questions). During the interview process, it is one of the primary responsibilities of the researcher to make certain that their list of pre-arranged questions does not become an inflexible frame upon which to hang life stories,

however, but remains instead a guide to use in the process of exploring the experiences of the participants.

It was my intention to allow the participants of this study to lead the interview process as much as is possible while still remaining focused on the topic being explored. It is my belief that a participant who feels they have the freedom to explore their experiences both within themselves and with the researcher can provide a fuller, deeper and richer understanding of their own lived experience; a benefit not only for the researcher, but for the participant themselves.

- Interview Setting

Individual participant interviews were conducted at a time and location mutually agreed upon by the interviewee and researcher. An office was available for such purposes. All interviews were conducted by the researcher and were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

- Research Journal

As both the researcher and the informant enter into a conversation about the latter's lived experience, thoughts and feelings arise not only for the informant, but also for the researcher. As I previously mentioned, most hermeneutic researchers have a "heart-felt" connection to the research question. Thus, informants' stories can, and in all likelihood do, touch the researcher. If so, this can potentially have an impact upon the researcher's interpretation of the

interpretations being made by participants. In hermeneutic research the issue is not whether this happens—it invariably does—but rather, being aware of and auditing our subjectivity. While it is impossible to totally account for one's subjectivity, it is possible to take steps to ensure that these personal feelings are as transparent as possible, to both the researcher themselves and the larger academic community, so that they may be acknowledged and addressed openly.

It was my intention to keep a Personal Journal during the process of researching this paper. This method is a tried and true aspect of Participant Observation within Anthropology, a field that can be attributed with being one of the first disciplines within Social Science to utilize qualitative research methods. These personal journals are intended as a place for the researcher to record their own thoughts and perceptions on the entire research process itself and then used as a tool to assist with examination, both during the research process itself and after the conclusions are released.

As this journal keeping is one way in which the question of validity within the qualitative research environment can be addressed, it will be discussed in more detail in a later section (Validation Strategies: Process Validity).

- Pilot Study

Pilot studies are often seen as an opportunity to explore and practice the research interviewing process, which will hopefully enhance the quality of the later main study. In my cursory review of hermeneutic-oriented dissertations,

the rationale for a pilot study is often given as: developing competence at research interviewing; sensitizing the researcher to informants' lived experiences regarding the research question; learning how to invite the telling of those experiences; familiarizing oneself with the collection and analysis of data; and finally, an opportunity to "iron out" any problems encountered with and/or make changes to the research procedures before the main study is commenced.

Recently Morse (1997) has argued that pilot studies may not be pertinent to qualitative research. In hermeneutic research the theoretical scheme is developed from the analysis of saturated data obtained from all participants. Because of its very nature, information from a pilot study can never achieve saturation. Information is, at best, thin and thus could lead to inaccurate let alone misleading results. Thus, Morse argues the qualitative researcher is better served by "div[ing] right into the field" to increase their familiarity and, hence, sense of competence with this approach. This view is echoed by Kvale (1996) who notes, "Learning to become an interviewer takes place through interviewing... confidence is acquired through practice" (p. 147).

For the most part I agree with Morse's argument. Certainly I am no stranger to interviewing, having conducted hundreds of clinical interviews. I have confidence in my own style as an interviewer to create a safe and reflective interview conversation. Thus, a pilot study would not, in my opinion, increase my sense of competence. Kvale (1996), however, argues that although it may be difficult to draw a distinction between the two, clinical interviews and research

interviews produce different kinds of knowledge—the latter is aimed at obtaining knowledge of an individual's experience of the world while the former is aimed at bringing about some sort of change to an individual's world. Thus, it would appear, according to Kvale, that I am still somewhat a novice to research interviewing and a pilot study would be useful to sensitize me to this qualitatively different form of interviewing. I would agree with Kvale that most individuals come to therapy because something isn't working quite right in their life and as therapist we are there to help them address their concerns. However, Kvale assumes clinicians take a realist and expert position and therefore our interactions with clients are "one-sided" and our intentions are aimed at "changing" clients (pp. 20-21). I, and many other clinicians I know, would disagree with this somewhat antiquated view of therapy. My clinical work has taught me that therapy is largely a philosophical conversation between myself and the client that helps me to understand their lived experience. I am not "in charge of the questioning" nor is my aim to "instigate change in the patient's personality" as Kvale describes (pp. 20-21). Critical attention is paid to what is said, to their lived experiences, to what they want. What they do about their therapeutic question is up to them, not me, to decide.

Where I do see the value in conducting a pilot study is in the opportunity to reflect on myself as the researcher, to become aware of any biases, preconceptions or prejudices that may hinder an understanding of these fathers' lived experience of losing contact with their children. Living the experience

myself, I am aware of the impact it has had on my life. Since I am a vital part of a collaborative process of inquiry and understanding, it is important that I take a reflective stance in order to become aware of how my life's experiences impact upon and help shape the interpretations I make of others' stories.

A pilot study for the present study was conducted in the following manner. First, I had someone with experience of the research topic "interview" me. This provided valuable feedback as to the flow of questions, how they were structured, and the development of additional questions. Following this, I met with a father to pilot test the interview process. Although this father did not meet all of the criteria for appropriateness (he still held out hope that one day he would see his child) it provided a valuable opportunity to experience the interview and, importantly, allowed me to become aware of my own reactions during interviews, what Reissman (1993) calls the "prelinguistic" impact of the story. Doing so, I believe, helped me to be more open to hearing the study's participants' stories and allowed for new possibilities of understanding the lived experience of fathers' who have lost contact with their children.

Data Analysis

- Analytical Procedures

Understanding is at the heart of qualitative research. Indeed, as Heidegger has noted, at the heart of being human is the drive or quest to understand the world. But what do we mean when we say we "understand" or have an "understanding" of something? The qualitative research revolution has pointed

out that there exists not a single version of reality, but multiple versions and that, quite likely, there is no final vantage point from which to grasp a "truest" view of the world. This subjectivist epistemology has helped to give license and legitimacy to other views and research that were not accorded respect within a dominant positivistic paradigm. However, it has raised a fundamental question: Is interpretation up for grabs? Does anything go? Whose view is it that finds its way into the final analysis?

There is no simple answer to this question that will undoubtedly be debated for years to come. I believe, though, at present that the hermeneutic approach best addresses this issue. As I have noted, hermeneutics more than any other qualitative approach makes it clear that understanding is constructed by the researcher's interpretation of information provided by others. In other words, there is an epistemological relationship between the interpreter (researcher) and the object of interpretation (participants). This does not mean that only the researcher's pre-knowledge understanding is what determines the final analysis. Nor does it mean that it is solely based on participants' interpretations. According to Gadamer (1975) all interpretation involves a "tension" between the viewer's pre-knowledge and that of the other's interpretation. As one seeks to understand another's viewpoint or "horizon" as Gadamer refers to it, one's initial viewpoint (or horizon) will invariably be challenged. This can force a reformulation if the researcher maintains a mindful-reflective approach so as to not summarily dismiss a competing viewpoint. It is this embracing rather than

dismissing or controlling of one's prejudices and biases that permits the hermeneutical tension and, ultimately, a fuller understanding to occur. Understanding, then, is a negotiation between differing viewpoints, a process known in hermeneutics as the "fusion of the horizons" (Gadamer, 1975).

Hermeneutic research has no step-by-step method. If it has any method, it is, as Gadamer (1975) notes, "to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place" (p. 263). Nonetheless, van Manen (1990) has attempted to outline a methodological structure that I believe facilitates a "fusion of the horizons." Incorporating his research "activities" with my own notions of interpretation based on clinical experience, I conceive the interpretative process as involving:

1. Pre-knowing awareness. Acknowledging my thoughts and feelings—both as a father and as a researcher—about the research topic and process so that I may be open to their challenges.
2. Mindful listening to stories. A quieting of my inner voice so that I can better hear what participants are saying to me.
3. Mindful reading of interview transcriptions. This will help foster an immersion and sensitization of participants' lived experience.
4. Looking for and reflecting upon themes. Key words used by participants will be explored more extensively.
5. Revisiting themes with participants. During this part of the process I "re-interview" participants and work with them to help me better understand their experience by exploring these themes. This follows the hermeneutic rule

to understand the individual from the whole and the whole from the individual.

6. Returning to interview transcripts and the research journal. By returning to the transcripts and my own research journal a deeper understanding and appreciation of participants' stories can emerge.
7. Awareness of my changing horizon. Throughout the above, being aware and reflective of how I am experiencing participants' stories so that my "horizon" is open to what they are saying.

Hermeneutics argues there is no way to sever ourselves from our historicity without undercutting our ability to be human. Nor is there an external vantage point from which we can describe and understand ourselves, once and for all. These epistemological conditions—which are antithetical to positivism—instead acknowledge what it is to truly be human and in doing so open the door for a fresh, new way of looking at the world and, indeed, ourselves. Each of us has a unique horizon, filled with assumptions and prejudices, from which we view and understand the world and ourselves. Thus, with many horizons there are many interpretations. This study is but one possible interpretation of the lived experience of divorced fathers who have lost contact with their children. I firmly believe, though, by approaching their stories with the above analytical procedure that I was in, perhaps, the best methodological position, to hear and convey to the reader their voices.

Validation Strategies

Whether research is conducted in the quantitative or the qualitative vein, the researcher is faced with the crucial question, "Are you measuring [or understanding] what you think you are measuring [or hearing]?"³⁴ (Kerlinger, 1979, p. 138). Indeed, the discussion about paradigm differences and legitimacy is perhaps nowhere more controversial than with the subject of validity. Although positivism is probably not well suited to providing a window into participant's lived experiences, it has made rigorous attempts to design research that allows the data to speak for itself, even if it runs counter to the researcher's expectations. This particular lack of rigour has been the main criticism of qualitative research.

Many attempts have been made to coin terms to represent validity measures for qualitative research, none of which have received overwhelming support from the research community. Terms such as "Truth Value", "Credibility", "Trustworthiness", "Authenticity," and "Goodness" have been suggested as alternatives to quantitative validation expressions (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Others have argued that qualitative research is based on completely different epistemological and ontological assumptions and, therefore, positivistic validity criteria are inappropriate (Hammersley, 1992). How, then, does the researcher convince the reader that the results of their study are legitimate and do not fall into the realm of "pseudo-science"? Despite the non-consensus on these multiple views of validity, it is necessary to outline some

form of a validation strategy to demonstrate rigorous research and avoid methodological anarchy.

At present, because there are so many competing definitions of validity in qualitative research, the terms decided upon for any given study appear to be dependent upon the researcher's personal belief system and/or the individual nature of the study itself. In my review of various qualitative studies, I have become aware of certain criteria themes that I employed to gauge the validity of the results.

- Philosophical Validity

As previously argued, all research is guided by a set of theoretical assumptions—ontological, epistemological, and methodological. Each one informs the other and together they address the research question. Therefore, it is imperative that these assumptions be logically consistent and congruent. If they lack this from the outset, there is room to question whether or not the results of a study can be trusted.³⁵

To address this issue, I have carefully considered and outlined in Chapter III: Research Paradigm (Philosophical Framework; Theoretical Perspective) the relationship between the study's ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. The reader is invited to peruse these sections again to determine whether or not these philosophical assumptions are indeed congruent and consistent. If so, and I believe they are, then I have addressed the first validation criteria for the purposes of this study.

- Transparency Validity

According to Hermeneutics, research is an act of interpretation. The meanings of participant's lived experiences are interpretations of the researcher. Unlike positivistic approaches that strive to control and avoid biases, in qualitative research and, in particular, Hermeneutics the researcher's biases and pre-knowing can and do play a role in these interpretations. "Every seeking gets guided be-forehand by what is sought" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 24). It is simply not possible to separate the self from the research.

Nonetheless, biases and pre-knowing do not go unchallenged. Left unacknowledged, they can inhibit the movement towards a deeper understanding of the research question. It is, therefore, important that the researcher's biases and pre-knowing are open to revision in the face of new information that challenges their world-view. And in order to be open to change they must first be acknowledged.

Lincoln and Guba (2000), stress a process of reflexivity to address these issues. According to these authors, reflexivity is the conscious interrogation by the researcher on him or her self regarding biases and pre-knowing. Actively doing so exposes, clarifies, and opens them to be reshaped or revised by the introduction of new information.

For the purposes of this study, I have discussed this issue in Chapter III's Researcher's Context and will be discussing it in Process Validity immediately below. Again, as with the previous criteria, I invite the reader to peruse these

sections to gauge the openness and thoroughness of my beliefs prior to conducting the study and, thus, how they can have an impact on the study's findings.

- Process Validity

As mentioned in a previous section (Chapter IV's Data Collection), participants' lived experiences are a communication between themselves and the researcher. During this process, many thoughts and feelings arise on both sides of the conversation process. The very nature of qualitative research, and indeed hermeneutical research in particular, suggests that a personal reaction and connection to the subject matter is inevitable and a researcher can easily find themselves affected by the stories being heard from participants. These personal feelings could, if unacknowledged, unduly influence the final interpretations of the study.

Anthropology has offered an interesting tool to assist with this inevitability. Personal journals have long been an aspect of the Anthropological fieldwork process. Over the years, they have provided valuable information to the larger academic community as it attempts to understand why and under what circumstances the researchers reached the conclusions they did.³⁶ By attempting to understand, or at least elucidate, any personal feelings or biases they may have held or experienced during the course of their research, readers can determine for themselves how trustworthy they believe the study to be.

Journal keeping of this nature, however, moves beyond merely providing additional information for others to use when assessing a piece of research. The very act of keeping such a journal allows the researcher themselves to continually check back, assess and reassess their own work and moderate which direction their choices are taking them and process why that may be. This opportunity to revisit decisions made during the research process provides yet another avenue of personal insight into the study itself.

- Representative Validity

It can be argued that one way to validate a qualitative study is to garner the reactions of the group being studied towards the final results of that study. If the conclusions reached by the researcher seem congruent with the lived experiences of the group or individual under investigation, then a significant degree of credibility can be granted to the study. If the group or individual feels that the study represents their lived experience to the larger world in an accurate and enlightening way, then the study can be deemed successful on at least one significant level.

Additionally, a researcher can garner a sense of soundness for a study's findings by determining whether or not the group being studied feels the results of the research can be of practical use to them whether as a means to help initiate a social change or as a general piece of knowledge that provides previously unrecognized and useful insight into their daily lives. While it is not necessary that every member of the group being studied experience complete consensus

with one another on these issues, it is necessary that the vast majority agree on the study's usefulness and representation accuracy.

For the purposes of this study, it was my intention to continually check back with the participants throughout the interview process so that I might be as certain as possible that the information being offered is accurately interpreted and represented by myself. Once the study was completed and the results recorded, I returned to the participants and presented the results to them on an individual basis. At that time, I gauged their reactions and listened to their feedback. In this way, I hoped to provide another criterion to gauge the validity of the study.

- Communicative Validity

One of the most time-honoured and essential ways of increasing the validity of a study is to submit it to the scrutiny and criticism of the larger academic community. This scholastic dialoguing not only facilitates in validating individual studies, but also allows academia itself to fulfill one of its primary societal functions: to decide, ultimately, which pieces of research are worthy of inclusion in the larger base of academic knowledge.

In recent years, however, the process of academic scrutiny has changed somewhat as it attempts to take into account the increased application of qualitative research and the new ways in which research is done. No longer must the researcher take a passive role in the review process, quietly waiting for the outcome of the inquiry. Indeed, if there are no single, final interpretations then

who determines what a study should look like? In true hermeneutic fashion the process would ideally involve all parties connected to the project, including the researcher.

Through a dialoguing process, it is assumed that the best possible outcome will be the general agreement amongst members of the academic community on the credibility of the results of a given study. Ultimately, whether or not a study is included in the general base of knowledge tends to be determined by other researchers referencing the research in their own work. Once a study has successfully passed through the gauntlet of committee reviews and general academic inspections, and incorporated into the general base of knowledge, it acquires, as a result, a level of validity unattainable by almost any other means.

Time, of course, will tell whether or not the present study is validated this way.

- Pragmatic Validity

Pragmatic validation moves beyond that of communicative validation in that it moves academic research away from the confines of theoretical discussion and into the realm of real-world action. It is the act of literally making a study “true” by applying the findings to real life situations and attempting to instigate change as a result. In the most simplistic of terms, if the changes desired by the original undertaking of the study occur as a result of the research, the study can be considered valid.

While some in the research community have viewed action as a contaminant to the research process by introducing advocacy and subjectivity into the research process, many modern-day academics have come to appreciate the intrinsic value of social action as part of academic study. In particular, action-oriented perspectives (e.g., Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, Critical Race Theory) advocate efforts to go beyond mere interpretation by encouraging researchers to consider social action as part and parcel of the research process. Indeed, some researchers have gone as far as to insist that it is part of the general academic responsibility to ensure that research is used for social action rather than existing merely as knowledge for knowledge's sake.

This praxis-oriented approach to research naturally has its opponents as some academics argue that it is the place of community organizations to utilize research for social action, not the researcher. However, as qualitative research comes into its own, researchers are finding consensus in the notion that knowledge is not passive. With this in mind, it becomes an interesting question of whether or not researchers still have the same perceived responsibility to remain distant and impartial from the community at large. Many within the academic community, it seems, have chosen to become socially involved with their research topics. I have made it clear that I too would like to see the proposed research used for transformative purposes.

Again, time will tell whether or not the study meets this validity criterion.

We live in a time where it seems almost “anything goes.” Old ways of gauging validity have been challenged and to many methodological anarchy is at our research doorstep. However, I believe the above validation criteria—Philosophical, Transparency, Process, Representative, Communicative, and Pragmatic—provide sound research validation standards which together can help the reader determine whether or not the study is worthy of acceptance.

CHAPTER V

THE CONVERSATIONS

This chapter will present the stories of the four fathers interviewed in this study. They are constructed from the transcripts of their interviews. Throughout these stories, the co-researchers own words will be included—in *“italicized quotations”*—to give emphasis. The stories are presented back-to-back and their comments after reviewing it are included. To protect their anonymity fictitious names for themselves as well as their ex-partners and their children are used. These are their stories.

Co-researcher 1: Ian

- Ian’s Story

Ian was a 49 year old male at the time of interview. Ian presented as a calm, soft-spoken individual, but with a quiet passion when discussing topics he felt strongly about. Ian appeared to have well above average cognitive skills, easily expressing himself, both intellectually and emotionally. Indeed, I was often inclined to think he had a degree in literature given his strong command of the English language. *“I used to read a lot, mainly the classics when I was a child. A bit odd, I suppose, but there you are...I really enjoy reading.”* He is the older of two children; he has a brother who is married and has two children *“A wonderful father. Very caring, very nurturing to his children.”* His parents are still married. His mother stayed at home to raise him and his brother while his father worked.

"Looking back at that, now with many children having both parents working, we were very fortunate there was someone there when we came home from school." Ian stated he was close to his parents and brother and characterized their marriages as positive. He said, *"My parents have a wonderful marriage. They never utter a harsh word to one another. There is just a lot of love and respect between them. It is something that I am thankful for as I was growing up...something I could gather strength and courage from."* Ian described his brother's children as well-adjusted young adults. *"They remind me of myself and my brother. They love studying for the sake of knowledge, to understand their world and themselves better."* Ian described a very typical childhood and adolescence—lots of friends and social activities (*"I had a number of close friendships. We shared a passion for literature, the sciences, chess, you know, that sort of thing"*), doing well in school. (*"I guess some might refer to me as a nerd, but I truly enjoyed reading and studying"*), and no significant emotional issues or incidents (*"Quite uneventful, I dare say. Perhaps if I had been more 'with it' trouble would have found me."*)

Ian attended university straight out of high school (*"There was no pressure from my parents; it was what I wanted to do"*), receiving his B.A. from one of British Columbia's major universities and then his M.A. from the same. During his graduate studies he met his future wife, Mary, who was also pursuing a graduate degree. Ian described the early part of their relationship as wonderful. *"Here was this woman, who in many ways was different from me—outgoing, full of energy and a zest for life—but we just seemed so right for each other, complimented one*

another so well. I remember I was so happy during that time." Mary's parents were divorced, but Ian's impression of them was that their lives had moved on. She had no siblings.

After graduation both Ian and Mary obtained jobs and began their careers. After a few years they both decided they wanted to start a family and they had a daughter, Janice. With the birth of his daughter Ian was filled with "*...a sense of wonder. I knew I wanted to be involved, emotionally as well as intellectually, in my children's' lives, but I was surprised how much her birth affected me. I really had no idea it would change my way of looking at the world, at myself.*" It was agreed between them that Mary would stay home to raise Janice, at least until she was old enough to attend day care. However, within 3 months of being a stay-at-home mother Mary decided she wanted to return to work. According to Ian, Mary's position at her work was "fast-tracked" for advancement and she was concerned she would lose that opportunity if she didn't return as soon as possible. Ian agreed and decided to stay home to continue with their daughter's care, taking a leave from his job. For Ian, this was a pivotal point in his life. "*I had not really paid too much attention to children, but with my own and staying home to take care of her I experienced a profound sense of duty and love that I could not imagine not being a parent.*" For Ian this time with his daughter is considered one of the most cherished times in his life. "*To be certain, it was very difficult at times, but what I experienced as a parent, as a father, is almost indescribable to someone unless they have experienced it themselves.*"

When it became time for Ian to return to work, he sat down with Mary to discuss care for their 18 month old daughter. According to Ian, he couldn't imagine someone else taking care of her while they were at work. *"I had been with [Janice] for a year and then here we, or I, was faced with handing over her care to a relative stranger. I didn't want to. I wanted one of her parents to be there for that. That was important to me. I was also feeling an incredible sense of loss. I was discovering a new way of being in the world through watching her discover the world around her."* Mary's career, however, had progressed within the company so that financially they could afford to have Ian stay home, at least until she went to school.

Ian stayed home with Janice and as mentioned above immensely enjoyed this time in his life. As Janice became less dependant on his total concentration he assumed other household duties—cleaning house, grocery shopping, cooking. As far as Ian was concerned he was in a personal heaven. *"I remember being so happy, so alive. Wherever I went, whatever I was doing Janice was with me. I felt so connected to her. It was the most rewarding time in my life."*

During this period Ian met with a number of fathers who were also staying at home and taking care of their children. As Ian describes, *"I met a number of other Dads who shared their stories, providing me with an opportunity to compare notes...see how they did things with their kids."* Ian would regularly meet with these dads on his daily coffee jaunts as they provided adult stimulation. *"You need to interact with adults when caring for a child full-time. Your vocabulary and perspective can easily become very, shall I say, simple, which isn't to say it is a bad*

thing...the adult interaction balances it." They also provided support. *"Raising a child, staying at home is extremely difficult work. Because it is not 'paid work' it is seen as not really being work. Coupled with being a man who has decided to stay home to care for his children, well, that is somewhat new in our culture and not always met with approval by others so these fathers, as was with my family, were my support network."*

Despite Ian's contentment with being a stay-at-home father, at home, tensions were emerging between he and Mary. *"It is apparent now, looking back, that Mary was very career-orientated and that having a husband and a child really made it difficult for her as to how to spend her time and energy. She increasingly worked longer hours and often weekends."* Ian also noted that Mary increasingly wanted more 'things.' *"As her salary increased so did her spending and acquisition of material goods. Some of this I enjoyed, but I began to feel that we were trying to keep up with the Jones, if you catch my meaning."* Ian found himself more and more running the household and taking care of their daughter. Ian indicated that he tried to talk to Mary about the changes he was seeing, but these were dismissed. *"I'll always remember this...she told me someone, and she emphasized someone, had to work to pay for everything. When I suggested we didn't need quite as much, that we could live a bit more modestly she laughed and said that was easy for me to say as I didn't work. Didn't work? I asked her what she thought I was doing with my time and she said she actually didn't know. I felt demoralized. If I wasn't appreciated for what I was doing for our daughter, our family really, then what was I?"*

Ian stated that he began to invest more of his time and energy into raising Janice. *"In hindsight I should have addressed the marital problems, but instead I became a heavily invested in my daughter's life. I didn't see myself as some kind of super-dad. Rather, as a caring and involved parent."* For the next three and a half years Ian devoted himself to his daughter and tried to avoid getting into conflict with Mary. That all changed right before Janice entered Kindergarten when Mary informed him she wanted a trial separation. Ian assumed he would continue to take care of Janice but was told that Janice would be living with Mary, and that she had day care in place for after school. Ian recalled being dumbfounded and crushed. *"Here I had been taking care of our daughter all these years and then suddenly I'm being pushed out of the picture. I remember being so confused and hurt. It felt as if my whole being was being ripped apart."*

Ian recalls telling his daughter that her Mom and Dad were going to live apart. *"She didn't, couldn't understand. How could she? She was only 5 years old. My world had come apart and now I watched as her life did too. I felt so guilty, so sorry for her, as if I had personally let her down...I knew there were problems between Mary and I and I did not really do anything to address that. So, in essence, I believed I let my daughter down."* Ian and Mary eventually worked out an arrangement where he could see Janice after school and have weekends with her.

On his own now, Ian obtained a part-time job that was flexible enough to allow him to pick up his daughter after school and spend a few hours with her before her mother arrived to pick her up. *"More often than naught, those after school*

times included making dinner, helping her with her homework. Mary was quite invested in her career and she often didn't come by until the evening to pick Janice up."

For the next five years Ian continued to live this way: a part-time job that adequately paid the bills and devoting his time and energy to raising Janice. *"For me the joy I experienced in life was watching my daughter grow up. I had so much fun with her, as if I too was rediscovering the world. I didn't have a lot of money, but I didn't really care. I wanted to share this incredible learning experience called life with my daughter. I cannot think of any other activity that would have brought me more pleasure and fulfillment."*

Ian disclosed that, although he would have preferred to raise his daughter, indeed any child, within a marriage, he had reconciled within himself that he would be a single parent. *"I believe that children do best with both parents actively involved in their children's lives. Yes, some people raise children on their own, and some find another partner, but I believe deep down they, the children, want to live within a family that includes their biological mother and father."* Also, he and Mary had not formally divorced and Ian thought that perhaps one day they would get back together, even if it meant a sacrifice on his part. *"If Mary would have wanted to get back together I would have, albeit with some regrets, but would have made the very best of it."*

Shortly before Janice's 11th birthday Ian received a written notice that Mary was filing for divorce. He was stunned, though, to see she was also looking for full-custody with "limited" access for him. As Ian recalled, *"Here I was, once*

again, being pushed aside, and because of what? What had I done to deserve this kind of treatment?" Ian and his lawyer met with Mary and her lawyer to try to work out a more equitable arrangement, but Mary was adamant that she have sole custody and that his time with Janice be more controlled. The court eventually favoured a joint custody arrangement, but with primary care given to Mary. "I never once entertained the idea of pursuing sole custody, but I thought we could share our homes on more equitable terms. Mary would hear none of that."

Ian continued to see his daughter every other weekend for a few more years, but this soon changed. Ian noticed a growing reluctance on Janice's part to spend time with him. At first he thought it was simple adolescence, wanting to spend time with friends, but he felt an emotional detachment occurring from Janice. "I couldn't quite pinpoint what I was sensing, but I felt as if Janice was uncomfortable being with me. I tried to discuss this with her, but she seemed almost afraid to say anything." Efforts to deal with this were met with dismissal from Mary. "She just wants to spend more time with her friends', her mother would say." Ian tried to seek advice from counsellors, but was told that a teenager was permitted to choose whether or not they wanted to see the non-custodial parent. "I simply became an object to these people. Why would man spend so much time, effort and money to see his child was what I was hearing from them. Was I just trying to be another "controlling" male or was there something else, more sinister? ...I was so angry at this one therapist that I seriously considered making a complaint to her board, but I was so tired of fighting...so tired of it all."

Over the next few years Ian's contact with Janice decreased. *"She was either too busy with homework, too busy with activities, too busy with friends. I was feeling pushed away. I sought legal advice and, like the counsellors I saw, was informed that a child could decide if they wanted to see or not see the non-custodial parent. I felt I was losing her and no one could help me nor seemed to care."*

Then the day occurred when Janice stopped seeing him altogether. For Ian, this was the most devastating experience in his life. *"I tried to arrange a visit to see her and her mother informed me, rather coldly as I remember, that Janice did not want to see me. I was shocked. What had I done? How did things come to this? I couldn't believe what I was hearing... My whole being felt as if it had been ripped apart."* For some time Ian tried to make contact with Janice but to no avail. Contact was also lost between Janice and his family. *"My parents and brother tried talking with Mary, but she wouldn't discuss what had happened. Eventually, she quit answering their calls. They, too, were devastated. Janice was a part of their family and now was unexplainably gone."*

Ian recalled going into what he now describes as a depression. *"I felt detached from life. It was if nothing mattered...I don't like to admit this, but it was so dark at the time that I thought about not living anymore."* His doctor prescribed antidepressants, but they didn't ease the pain of his loss and he discontinued taking them. Ian also recounted that he felt very ashamed and judged by others when he spoke of his loss. *"After awhile I no longer mentioned that I had a daughter and that I didn't see her. The questioning look, that, 'My God, you must have done something*

terrible that your own daughter doesn't want to see you', cut right through me. It seemed as if I had done something horribly wrong to my daughter...I sometimes thought that maybe I did...It was just easier to not say anything."

Ian was also painfully reminded of his loss every month when he balanced his chequing account. *"Every month I was reminded of what had happened. I was still legally required to pay for child support even though I no longer saw her. It wasn't about the money. I know some people believe it to be about this. But it wasn't. It was about the injustice; your child's relationship can be maliciously taken from you, but you will continue to pay the person who did this. How fair or right is that?"*

Ian's daughter is now 23 years old. He has not seen her in nine years. For the past seven years Ian has lived a life that he describes as *"...being on hold, not going forward, not going anywhere really. Stuck in a quagmire of grief, shame and guilt."* Ian was also reluctant to become involved with anyone else. *"If a woman I was seeing had children I thought, 'You don't want to get close to them; they'll just be taken away from you eventually.'... Becoming involved with a woman who didn't have children was also out of the question, even if they said they didn't want any. I thought, 'What if they eventually want a child?' I knew that I would be forced to end that relationship...As you can see, there really was no point in me becoming involved with someone else."*

After hearing countless times that *'she'll eventually try to make contact with you when she gets older'* Ian reached a point in his life where he felt he had to let go of Janice in order for him to engage in life once again. *"That was perhaps*

the most difficult decision I made in my life. It wasn't really a decision in the sense of, here's a problem, what can be done about it, and then take some kind of action. It was a process that took a very long time. Essentially, I had given up hope that I would ever see her again and to deal with that pain, that loss, to get on with my life, I needed to let go. One day it just felt like I was no longer a father. I have this memory of being one at one time in my life, but it feels more like a dream. I no longer consider myself a father... You asked me, 'If I could go back in time and could decide whether or not I would choose to be a father,' ...I would have to say no."

- Ian's Review

"How does one capture something that had such a profound effect on one's life and occurred over so many years? This account of my story, though, reflects quite well what I said in my interviews. I'm very appreciative of the opportunity to tell my story and contribute to this study."

Co-researcher 2: Warren

- Warren's Story

Warren was 50 years old at the time of interview. However, and he would be the first to admit it, he looks much older. As Warren stated, *"I think what I went through aged me...a lot."* Warren, like all the fathers in this study, presented as above average intelligent. He has an undergraduate degree from a major Canadian university in Ontario. He is employed full-time, having been with the same employer for the past seventeen years.

Warren reported he had what he considered an average childhood and adolescence. *"Don't really think too much about when I was a kid. I think I was fairly happy, had friends, did all those kids' things. My teens were a bit rough, whose wasn't, you know, girls, trying to fit in, not knowing what I wanted to do when I finished."* His parents are still married. *"Theirs is a traditional marriage; Mom at home, Dad at work. It works well for them."* Warren is the second child in a family of three siblings. He described his older brother and younger sister in affectionate terms, having not always been the case with his brother. *"My brother and I used to fight a lot. Over stupid things when I think about it. Well, what do you know when you're a kid. But we get along quite well."* Both of his siblings are married and have children of their own. *"They're doing OK. Good kids...It hasn't always been easy for my brother. I think at one time he and his wife were going to split up, but they worked it out and everything seems OK now."*

School was not his favourite way of spending time (*"I got decent grades and I really didn't try that hard."*), but he persevered and completed high school. Upon graduating he went to work in the construction trade. *"I wanted a car, a stereo, and have some money to enjoy myself."* Warren did this for about four years and then decided to go to College. *"I was getting bored of really doing nothing with myself and wanted to do something different so I enrolled in College."* During College he met his future wife, Susan, who was employed in the retail sector. They started dating and began living together after awhile. After Warren's second year of College he transferred to University where he completed his undergraduate degree. Warren

found employment almost immediately (*"It was a decent job, better than what I used to do. It paid well."*) and he and Susan became engaged. Two years later they were married and had the first of two children, Jonathan; Christa, their daughter, was born two years later.

Warren recalls the birth of Jonathan and Christa as being very special moments in his life. *"When Jon was born something changed in me. It was if I was no longer just concerned with my self, I had a child to take care of, to protect. That was a wake-up call for me...I was there when Christa was born. There was something about her, maybe because she was so small, I felt very protective of her. I remember thinking, 'I'll never let you down.'"*

It was agreed that Susan would stay home to raise the children. *"I never thought anything but that the Mom would stay home and raise the kids. My job paid OK. It was a bit tight, money-wise with only one income, but there were career opportunities in the company and I thought I stood a good chance of getting a promotion so I wasn't too worried about money...Susan was also very good at budgeting. That helped a lot."*

Warren stated he had not really given much thought to having children. *"I assumed I would have kids of my own some day. I never really thought about it too much."* Warren stated he helped out as much as he could to take care of the children. *"I'd come home some days and I could see that Susan was tired. I'd be tired too, but I would take over for a while so Susan could get dinner ready, have a break from the kids."* As they grew older he found himself enjoying them more and more. *"I loved my kids when they were little, but as they got older, more independent I guess, I*

found it more fun being around them. My Dad was kind of that way. Mom took care of us when we were babies and then he spent more time with us as we got older. At least, that's how I remember it."

Over time, Warren said he became increasingly emotionally connected with the children. *"Jon was a pretty active kid...I never really worried about him, but Christa, she was so tiny. I became concerned about her safety, didn't want her to get hurt in life so I started spending a lot of time playing with her."* This growing attachment to both children became very evident one weekend when Warren had to go out of town on a business trip. *"It really hit home this one time when I had to go out of town for a conference. I found myself thinking about Susan and the kids. I was really missing them. And I felt very protective of them. I even asked my brother to go and see if everything was OK. I wanted to go home so badly. I must have made a dozen calls home that weekend."*

Prior to Jonathan entering Kindergarten, Warren was asked if he would like a promotion that would involve a transfer to the west coast. The salary increase was significant and after discussing it with Susan they moved to Victoria. While it was a golden opportunity for Warren, in hindsight he saw that it was a difficult move for Susan. *"She was close to her family. They were less than a half hour's drive away from us and she spent quite a bit of time with them. My parents were also nearby and I knew that I was going to miss them, but the job opportunity was so good that I didn't want to pass it up... We didn't know anybody in Victoria. I got to know people at work, but Susan spent her time with just the kids. Looking back at it I can*

see that she was lonely in that way. I guess it was a bit unfair, but I thought we had each other and the kids and that would be OK."

With the increase in income Warren and Susan bought a house. Warren thought he *"had made the good life,"* but problems began to occur between he and Susan. *"I thought with having a house and all that we were doing OK, but I guess I was wrong. We started fighting, about stupid little things. It just got worse over time."* That summer, Susan said she wanted to go back to her parents' home for a visit with the kids. Warren thought it might be a good idea for Susan to see her family. However, he stated he had a funny feeling about it. *"At the time, I couldn't say exactly what it was, but I felt something was not quite right. I asked her if everything was Ok and she said it was so I just forgot about it."*

Susan was to spend a month at her parents, but when the time came to return Warren was informed by Susan that she wouldn't be returning. Warren's first reaction was to want to get on a plane and fly back to talk to her about this, but she said she had made up her mind and didn't want to come back. *"I remember saying to her that I could quit my job and we could live back there, but no, she wasn't certain she wanted to be with me anymore. And then it hit me: what about the kids? She said they would be staying with her. That is when I felt like everything was coming apart. What about the kids? What was I going to do?"*

Warren said that his life felt out of control from that moment on. While he had co-workers whom he interacted with, he felt very alone in Victoria. At one point he considered quitting his job, but his brother suggested he stay and take

some time off work, visit the kids, visit his family, and perhaps meet with Susan to see if there was a chance of reconciliation. Warren obtained a three week leave and flew back. He recalled, *"I was scared. I just didn't know what was going to happen between Susan and me, and I was scared that if it didn't work out I was going to have to make some hard decisions about my job if I wanted to be with my kids."* Warren eventually met with Susan and with it increasingly apparent they would not be getting back together Warren was faced with the decision to move back or become a commuter parent. *"The company had openings back there so I had to decide: stay or quit my job and move back. After talking with my family I decided I would give it a try back in Victoria for the next six months. If it didn't work out I'd quit my job and move back."*

For the next seven years Warren either commuted to see his children or they flew out to see him. He held a small hope that he and Susan would reconcile, but when she informed him she had met someone (whom she eventually married) and wanted a divorce he accepted that the marriage was truly over. Warren dated women but no one on a long-term basis. *"I just didn't see getting serious with anybody. It just didn't seem right that if I became involved with someone I would get to spend more time with someone else's kids than my own."*

After Susan's remarriage Warren found her increasingly colder towards him and seemed to make it difficult to arrange times to be with the kids. *"It seemed that once she got remarried, I was this obstacle for her sense of family. What I mean is, she seemed to want to have this nice, neat, little family package that was hers,*

but with me there, I was in the way of that.” The interaction between he and Susan became increasingly conflictual over time. *“We just seemed to be arguing all the time. I didn’t understand what the problem was. I mean, I’m here in Victoria and only out there four times a year, the kids coming out for a few weeks in the summer and part of the Christmas holidays, so what was the problem? It was hard on the kids too. I could see they were affected by all this arguing.”*

As the years went on Warren began to notice some changes in his children as well. Increasingly, proposed visits were cancelled, the children saying they were busy with school and extra-curricular activities. When they did come out to visit, Warren noticed a change in attitude towards him. *“During one visit, Jon asked me how much money I made. I remember thinking, ‘Where is that coming from?’ so I told him I made a decent salary. He then said why didn’t I give his mother more money then. I was already giving her a fair child support payment. I couldn’t believe it. She’s with someone and she’s complaining about how much money I give her. And why did the kids know. I asked Jon if he had heard something—I didn’t want to accuse his mother of anything—and he said no. But you know, I didn’t believe him. She was saying things to the kids.”*

One day Warren’s mother telephoned him saying she tried to see the children one weekend and they informed her they were going to be moving soon. *“I telephoned Susan right away and asked her what was going on. She told me [her husband] got a job... about a four hour drive from where they were. I asked her why she hadn’t told me before and she said where she wanted to live was her business not mine. I*

remember how angry she sounded, like she hated me." Warren tried to make arrangements to fly out and see the kids, but Susan informed him it wouldn't be a good time for a while. The kids, she said, needed time to adjust to their new surroundings and she would give him a call.

When Warren did not hear from Susan for over a month he became concerned. Her telephone number was unlisted and so he called her parents. Warren recalls, *"I'd always thought that I got along with Susan's parents, especially her Dad, but when I called them asking for Susan's number they wouldn't give it to me. I couldn't believe it, especially that her father wouldn't tell me. I thought we got along OK..."* Warren asked them to give a message to Susan informing her he wanted to see the children and that he had a right to see the children and wanted to make arrangements to do so.

A few weeks went by and Warren had still not heard from Susan. Warren contacted his lawyer who, in turn, contacted Susan's lawyer. After some exchanges Warren was given Susan's telephone number. When Warren called to talk to the children he was not expecting the reception he received. *"I telephoned almost immediately after getting her number. She was very cold to me. I asked to speak to Jon and she said he wasn't there; he was out with some friends. So I asked to speak to Christa. I could hear her say something to someone and then she said 'She doesn't want to come to the phone.' I couldn't believe it. I got angry 'cause I thought Susan was jerking me around so I demanded to speak to Christa. Susan said no and then hung up. I tried calling back but only got a busy single. I was so angry. Once I settled down I was*

feeling very depressed and anxious. 'What was going on?' kept going through my mind over and over again."

Warren contacted his lawyer and efforts were made to obtain an order to see his children. What happened shocked Warren deeply. *"Jon was twelve going on thirteen I think and Christa was turning eleven. The judge who heard the case stated that they were of an age where they could decide if and when they saw the non-custodial parent. I couldn't believe it. What went wrong? What had I done?"*

Warren continued to attempt contact the children but to no avail. A restraining order was eventually issued that he was not to call the house anymore if the children wanted to see him they would contact him. Warren flew out and tried to see the children, but again his efforts were fruitless. Warren recalls that time as the worst in his life. *"I basically came undone. I didn't know what to do, whom to contact...It felt as if my life was spinning out of control. I couldn't sleep, I cried a lot, my performance at work was the shits. I saw my doctor and he put me on anti-depressants. They helped a bit, but what? Help me to accept that my kids were being taken away from me and there was nothing, absolutely nothing that I could do?"*

Warren stated that his life went on, but he felt he was in limbo. *"It felt like I was stuck, in this blackness that wouldn't go away. Oh yeah, I did things, saw people, had fun at the time, what not, but when I stopped to think about my life I felt this emptiness, as if something had been ripped from me. I describe it to some people that I was emotionally raped. That's how I see it. Emotionally raped and the courts OK'd it."* Warren began having trouble sleeping and his doctor prescribed a sleeping aide,

but Warren did not follow through with this. *"I don't like admitting this, but I started drinking, quite heavily. It made me forget about how I felt, but after awhile I was drinking just to drink. Did this for quite awhile, 6 to 8 months. It started affecting my work. I'd be all hung over and show up for work. I was a safety risk and so my boss called me in one day, said to bring a union rep with me, and asked me straight up if I had a drinking problem. I said no, but of course I did. So, I ended up going into treatment. It helped me stop drinking...it didn't make my situation any better though. Just learn how to live with the pain I guess."*

Warren has not seen or heard from his children in ten years. For about eight of those years he held out the hope that they would try and make contact with him. Warren stated he has given up of ever seeing them. *"I felt like I had to do something about all of this, but there was nothing I could do. I was stuck. I was hurt. I was angry. And every month I was reminded of that rape when I saw the support payments still going through...One day I received a letter from Jon asking if I would give him some money for his school. I already paid into a College fund for them and so I wrote back and told him, but I asked him if we could get together to talk. I haven't heard back from him in three years. I guess he just wanted my money, not his Dad."*

"I don't tell anyone that I have given up. Most people wouldn't understand. Most people would look at you as if there was something very wrong with you. Who doesn't try to see their kids? What kind of person gives up on seeing their kids? But you know, I've waited and waited. I just can't wait anymore. It hurts too much to wait."

"Would I have children again?" "Yes," replied Warren. There was a pause, as if he was thinking about that. I asked him what was going on for him. He replied, " I said yes and then I thought about it because as I said it [my response] didn't feel right. Guess I was saying what everyone expects you to say about your kids. You'll always be there for them, you'll always love them...Actually, no, I wouldn't want to have kids if I could go back in time and do it again. I've paid too big of a price. And I'm not just talking about money. It wasn't worth it. Not at all."

- Warren's Review

"It's kind of strange reading a condensed version of what you said. It's pretty much right on the money. It reflects what I said to you is what I think I'm suppose to say. Seriously, it does... One thing it can't show, though, is just how much it hurt. How do you describe it without actually showing it? Without actually going thru it? You can't."

Co-researcher 3: James

- James' Story

James was 55 years old at the time of these interviews. James presented as an intelligent individual with a quick sense of humour. He has held a number of positions within the public sector, moving easily within it because, as he pointed out, *"I'm pretty good at what I do. I've held a number of positions where I have proven myself. I get things done. So, what I apply for I usually get."*

James described his childhood as normal. *"A Mom who worked part-time, a Dad who worked all the time, a brother and two sisters...I did all the things that kids do."* James indicated his relationship with his mother was warm, but was challenging

at times with his father. *"He wasn't exactly what you would call warm. As a kid I thought he was a bit too strict, there were even times when I couldn't stand him. But looking back, he came from a different generation; they just did things differently than you or I."* James did well in school and was considered an athlete. *"I laugh when I think about that. I was a good at basketball, hockey, that sort of thing. Played on the school teams. Did some competitive skiing. But I was really just interested in girls. Sports seemed to be a good way to meet them and impress them. I was competitive because I was trying to impress them."* James indicated that all three siblings were married with his brother being married twice. *"[He] really got taken to the cleaners on that one. Lost the house to pay her off. He's lucky they didn't have any kids. Real lucky...My sisters [have] lucked out. Their husbands are good guys. We have fun when we get together. We'll play some pickup basketball, hockey, get the kids involved although the body isn't as flexible as it one was so we tend to watch it on TV more and more."*

After graduating from High School James went to work in the Forest Industry. *"It was a good time in the economy. Lots of work. Lots of money. For a young guy just out of High School it was great. I had a nice car, money to spend, what more could a guy ask for."* After several years of doing this James had an opportunity to obtain a trade certificate. *"I wasn't thinking about my future at all and then this apprenticeship opportunity came up so I thought, 'Hell, why not.' I'm glad I did because it has opened a lot of doors for me."*

During the apprenticeship James met a woman and they were married within six months. *"We really didn't know what we were doing. It was really exciting,*

but what do you know at twenty. I thought I was in love. She thought she was in love. It was lust, that's what it was. We got married. And we got divorced, all within two years. Oh man, I'm sure glad we didn't have any kids."

James continued with his apprenticeship, eventually completing it and obtaining a job in the public sector where he has worked since. *"The pays decent. Good benefits. I like working with the guys. I won't be going anywhere soon."* James dated for a few years (*"I had no interest in tying the knot again"*), but one day found himself enamoured with his future wife, Diane, who was a few years younger than him (*"Oh boy, did I have it bad for her. She was a wild one. We hooked up the first night we met and basically didn't stop."*) James and Diane moved in together which James describes as *"...convenient. We were together, well, I was with her because she was pretty hot. I guess she thought I was too, but now I think she liked the fact that I was working and paid for most things. She wasn't going anywhere and I was probably a good meal ticket."*

After awhile James and Diane began to argue. *"We had this pretty intense first three or four months where we got along, mainly in bed. But then we started fighting."* For James, these arguments did not make sense. *"I didn't understand what was wrong. Everything would be fine and then, wham!, in a second we'd be having this huge argument... I was really frustrated... And she would just yell at me, making no sense at all. Her Mom was like that to her father, always ragging on him about this or that. Never understood why he put up with it."*

One day Diane announced that she was leaving. James asked her to not go but she left. *"I felt pretty alone. Despite all the arguing, I missed her."* James eventually convinced Diane to return and shortly after she did she became pregnant. *"It wasn't planned, but it wasn't a surprise. She had been talking about wanting to have a baby, I would try to avoid the topic, but then it happened. What are you going to do?"* At first James was not too thrilled about being a father (*"I'd never really thought about being a father"*), but he noticed that Diane seemed happier and was considerably less argumentative. *"Because we were getting along better I kind of thought having a kid was maybe a good idea. She seemed happy, the happiest I'd ever seen her, we were getting along, it all seemed like a good thing."*

When the baby, Sarah, was born James was ecstatic. *"I was there, in the delivery room. When she was born, I couldn't believe it. It was a pretty incredible experience. I'll never forget it. It changed me; I was a better man for it. She was so tiny. Looked just like her Mom...I have to say, I was pretty happy, pretty damn proud. I thought I had it all then."*

James went back to work while Diane stayed home to care for Sarah. James immensely liked being a father. *"I'd come home from work and I'd want to spend all my time with Diane and the baby. I felt this huge responsibility to be a good father for her. And I felt very protective. God, she was so tiny. I just didn't want anyone ever to hurt her. She was so beautiful."*

For the first year every thing seemed fine to James, but then he began to notice a change in Diane. *"I started to see the old Diane come back. She would fly off*

the handle at the littlest of things. I thought maybe taking care of a baby was getting to her a bit, so I asked my Mom if she could help out, babysitting once a week so Diane could have some time to herself. That seemed to work at first, but then the arguing started up again."

Three months later Diane left which would be the first of several times over the next few years. *"Diane would leave, saying she wasn't happy with our relationship, but never telling me what she was exactly unhappy about. She'd take Sarah, go to her Mom's, they wouldn't get along and then usually after a month or two we'd end up getting back together."*

James stated that over the next few years he was very unhappy with his situation and began drinking with some guys he knew from work. *"I started going out for a beer with the guys after work sometimes. I'd forget about all the problems at home. I guess that's where I screwed up. And I really screwed up when I had an affair with someone I met at a bar. It was stupid, but I just was...now I'm making an excuse."* The affair was eventually discovered by Diane who left with Sarah to stay at her mother's. *"I knew that this time she wasn't coming back. I had screwed things up royally. And her mother just seemed to be all happy about us splitting up. I don't think she likes men. Treats her husband like crap and me she just hates. So her and Diane got along real well, both hating my guts."*

James attempted to reconcile with Diane, but she would not consider it. *"I spent the good part of half a year trying to get back with Diane, but she wanted no part of me. She was done."* During this time James saw Sarah sporadically. *"I thought*

because I had the affair and had screwed things up that I deserved what I was getting. I got to see Sarah, but not on a regular basis. Not until after the divorce." After six months of separation, Diane filed for divorce, but also applying for sole custody. "I didn't have a problem with Diane having primary residence, but sole custody? That's when I got mad. She was my kid too. There was no way I was going to go for that."

James fought the order and eventually joint custody was awarded with primary care given to Diane and every other weekend access given to James. *"I didn't like being told when I could see my kid, but there's not a lot you can do, unless you have a bunch of money to throw away. Even then..."*

James settled into a routine where he had Sarah every other weekend. At first he was not happy with having limited access, but after awhile made peace with it. *"It was hard at first, you know. Picking up your kid at a certain time, then dropping them off at a certain time. But once I got used to it I made the best of it. I did my thing for so many days then when I got Sarah I would just do everything with her. We actually had a lot of fun together."* Diane, however, did not appreciate this arrangement. *"She thought I had it easy, the 'Disney Dad' she called me. She'd say I didn't have to do the hard work, you know, getting her ready for school, that sort of thing. All I ever did was the easy stuff, the fun stuff. What was I suppose to do? Do nothing when I didn't have Sarah and do nothing when I did? I didn't want to raise my kid this way. I made the best of the situation. You have a weekend with your kid you're gonna make the best out of it. That's what I did. And for that I got crapped on."*

Diane eventually met someone and remarried, having a child with her new husband. At first James and Diane's new husband got along, but after awhile he became the 'spokesperson' for Diane. *"Whenever there was something we needed to discuss about Sarah, Diane and I would hash it out. [He] would kinda stay in the background. But after awhile he started to say things, about what should be done. At first it kinda pissed me off; she wasn't his kid so it was none of his business. But what are you gonna do? But then he started being the one being in charge and Diane would just sit back and let him do the talking. That really got me. And he didn't like me. I could tell. Who knows what Diane said to him... There was always this tension after awhile."*

This tension was fuelled by comments Diane would make to James. *"She started to call [her husband] 'Dad.' Like, she would say to me, 'Sarah's Dad will be here when you come pick her up,' things like that. She knew that would piss me off. I had no respect for him. I mean, you don't go around calling yourself a kid's Dad when you're not the Dad. I'd never do that to a guy... I had no respect for him."*

Despite this tension, James continued to see Sarah as she made her way through elementary school. They enjoyed their times together and would do something special when he had her over the summer holidays for a couple of two-week periods. *"Those were the best times. Away from Diane and [her husband]. We just had a lot of fun, doing father-daughter sort of things, you know? Camping, swimming, that sort of thing... I liked not having to deal with Diane and [her husband] because I thought they were trying to sabotage my times with Sarah. I mean, give me a*

break, she's only going away for a weekend and you have to argue about something stupid? When Sarah and I went away none of that BS was around. It was so nice."

As Sarah entered High School James noted a growing indifference in her. *"At first I thought it was just, you know, being a teenager and all that, but there was something else. We had always felt relaxed around one another and now there was this tension. My girlfriend at the time noticed it too."* As time went on, Sarah began to make excuses not to see James on a scheduled weekend. *"The first time that happened I remember being crushed. That's when it really hit me how much I cared about her, liked being around her. But I thought, 'She's a teenager, she has friends and things' and I just kind of accepted it. But then it started happening more and more."*

That summer Sarah informed James that she wouldn't be spending holiday time with him. *"She told me, actually left me a telephone message, that she was 'too busy' to spend four weeks with me. I tried to talk to her about it, but it felt like I was pulling teeth. She didn't want to spend that amount of time with me...Later she said she could meet me for lunch or dinner sometime. No suggestion about staying overnight or anything. Just, we can meet for lunch or dinner."* That summer, however, James, his girlfriend, and Sarah met only three times for a brief lunch visit. *"It was very strained. I could see she was very uncomfortable being with us. I didn't know what to do. I knew I'd get no help from her Mom. I just didn't know what to do."*

As Sarah entered a new school year that Fall, this situation got worse. *"I'd try and talk to her on the phone and she would start arguing with me. And then this one time she asked me why I had hit her mother. I couldn't believe it. I had never hit her*

mother. So I told her and that's when she said, 'That's not what Mom says.' You know, I was really pissed off right then. OK, I get angry, but I would never, ever hit a woman and I certainly didn't hit her." James called Diane to confront her about the accusations, but her husband answered and the conversation quickly deteriorated into a shouting match. *"He starts in on me, saying I hit Diane, and that everyone is afraid of me. I never raised a hand to my daughter, never once spanked her. Her Mom can't say the same. I was getting angry at this jerk calling me these names so I swore at him and hung up...Afterwards I just shook. I couldn't believe this was happening to me."*

James has not seen his daughter since that time. He consulted with a lawyer who informed him, like all the fathers in this study, that Sarah was of an age where she could decide whether or not to have contact with the non-custodial parent. Like the previous fathers, James life went on hold. *"I was always thinking about her, wondering what had happened between us. I couldn't figure it out. I'd try and tell people what happened and then I started getting the look, you know, 'Maybe he is a wife beater, maybe he used to hit his kid' that sort of thing. So I didn't say anything. But inside, James was torn apart. 'I used to cry, and I'm not a crier, but I used to cry a lot. Everything felt so unfair. And there was nothing I could do."*

James eventually moved away. *"I had to get away from [that town]. I was afraid if I saw Diane's husband I would say or do something that I would regret. So I applied for a transfer, got it, packed up and moved. That helped. But it still hurt a lot."* In his new job he wouldn't tell anyone what had happened. Over time, this

included even talking about her. *"I started to not talk about not only what happened, but about her. It was as if she didn't exist. People would ask me questions about her—what's she doing, that sort of thing—and I'd make stuff up. Partially because I didn't know, but also because she didn't seem real. Eventually she wasn't real."*

It has been nearly 15 years since James saw Sarah. He held out hope that one day she might try and make contact with him, but there has been none. *"Every once in awhile I'll hear something about her, but it doesn't mean anything to me now. I mean, I don't even know what she looks like. What's the point? I really don't have a kid anymore."*

"If I could go back in time would I have had children? I'd have to say no. You have no rights as a father. None. Thanks for the sperm, be on your way. That's how it feels...I never want to go through that again. Ever...It hurts way too much."

- James' Review

"I've read this and I really don't feel anything. Oh yeah, it really happened like you've written it, but I don't feel anything. It's weird."

Co-researcher 4: Tony

Of all the fathers' stories I listened to, Tony's was perhaps the one that brought it all together. Perhaps it was because his was the last story I heard, perhaps it was because my own "horizon" had already been deeply affected by what I had been hearing from the other fathers, but when I listened to him recount what happened in his life I experienced a heartfelt connection towards him and the other fathers. It was as if I was hearing my own story and the

stories of the other fathers being told all at once. Perhaps it is appropriate that his story is saved for the last. It is largely presented as a dialogue from him (he is very articulate and thoughtful) so the reader can have an uninterrupted experience of what he said. This is Tony's story.

- Tony's Story

"My expectations about being a parent, a father, were out of the ordinary. In talking to other parents I knew I wanted to be fully involved in my child's life, more involved than my own father was. I was very aware of wanting to be deeply involved in my children's lives before I became a parent. The attributes that are commonly thought about fathers are of protectors and doers. Being a listener, a nurturer is normally not ascribed to men, but we are very capable of doing this. The rules have changed for men the past twenty years so that they have an opportunity to explore a part of themselves that North American culture has for a long time said, 'No, this is not what it means to be a man. You must act this way.' Now we are asked, given permission, to participate fully in our children's lives. And we do because we can. That was exactly the tone I took from the start...very participatory."

"When my daughter [Celise] was born I experienced an incredible rejuvenation, a sense of wonder and joy about this experience we call life. I was absolutely astounded about the depth of my feelings. In my early twenties I really had no interest in kids. And there I was at age thirty-three experiencing a tremendous transformation in my life, all because of a new born baby."

"I had a wonderful time being a new father. Both my wife and I were working half time. I worked in the morning, would come home for lunch, and we would switch. She worked half time in the afternoon. I'd make lunch for Celise and then we would go out into the Kitsilano area. Sometimes I'd meet other fathers who were doing the same sort of thing as I was. We'd trade stories, like some people trade recipes, compare notes, see how they did things with their kids, and support one another as being this "New Age" father. Many fathers made changes in their lives to meet their kids' needs. And when I wasn't being with this fathers' group we would go hiking, look at the ducks, the trees, be a part of nature. Whatever we did, I felt as if I was truly alive, that I got to experience the world of discovery all over again. It was like being a child all over again for me."

"It's interesting, people's responses. Some would stare, some would giggle, sometimes conversations we cease as we walked by. Curious, a lot of grandmothers were quite supportive of us taking care of our children. You might not expect that, but they would smile so kindly at us [Dads]. [It was the] Rambo Mom's (that's what one Dad ended up calling them) who would look at what you were doing and take it upon themselves to tell you what you were doing wrong...They were upset about something, maybe they couldn't help themselves...something genetic where taking care of children is their domain. I don't know. Having said that, men were rather nonplussed mainly worried that their wives would want them to do more caring of their children. Sometimes I felt I had to tone it down around them as I wanted their approval. Regardless, it was the best time of my life."

Tony carried on this way for the next five years. However, while Tony experienced immense joy as a father, his marriage slowly began to deteriorate. Eventually Tony and his wife separated.

“Celise was six years old when her Mother and I split up. The split up wasn’t clean. By then we were living on [one of the Gulf Islands]. I was doing some renovation work and during that time it was decided Celise and her mother would move back to the Mainland until I finished the contract and then I would join them. So, they moved back to our house in Kitsilano while I stayed at the house on [the island] that we owned. However, once I moved them over I was suddenly frozen out...my wife had the telephone number disconnected. I couldn’t get a hold of them. It was extremely confusing. I didn’t know what was happening. Were we splitting up? Was it a trial separation? I didn’t know how to interpret this. It didn’t make sense.”

The courts determined that Tony and his wife would have joint custody of their daughter, but the primary residence would be with the mother. Over the next five years Tony tried to adjust to being a weekend-only father. For Tony, who was passionate about being immensely involved with Celise’s life this was extremely painful.

“Being away from Celise was hard, very painful when I didn’t have her. I cherished the times that we did have together, but when it came time for her to go back to her mother’s I could feel this pain deep inside me. It was if my soul was being torn out of me. That’s how I have to describe it. My soul being ripped apart. And I had to act normal, as if nothing was wrong. People would say, ‘Oh, you’ll snap out of it, you’ll feel

better, just you wait and see. You just need to put your nose to the grindstone. Get a girlfriend. And no matter what I did or what people said the pain, the grief would not go away. It put a hole in my heart that would not heal."

"I felt as if my loss as a father was not honoured. I remember I'd take her on the ferry back to the Mainland and her Mother would go, 'Oh, I missed you so much.' On and on. But, what about me? You see her most of the time. I get to see her every other weekend. It just really is not right. And then I would go home to a house, not a home, totally devoid of activity and be reminded of what I had loss. It was too damn quiet. Too damn quiet. So I pretended that Celise had gone out for the afternoon."

As Celise entered adolescence Tony noticed a withdrawal from him. Eventually this culminated in Celise not seeing him anymore. The effects of this were devastating.

" I used to be a passionate, sensitive, loving guy and now I just don't know or just don't care. I feel that I was stuck or that something has me stuck and I could not get over this hurdle, this thing, this relationship with my wife and kid. You know, I felt that I had been robbed of my fathering. I've been robbed of the years of being there to see Celise's development into a human being, from a young teen to a young woman. All that sharing, all that fun. And she has been robbed of having a father and, what many people fail to see sometimes, her extended family on my side. Uncles, aunts, cousins, both here and in [my mother country]. It's criminal, it's silly, pointless and what for? What the hell for?"

"As I tried to deal with my loss I found that how men should be responding to this loss, let alone how we should be as fathers, was largely written from a female

perspective. Even therapy had the bias. It was about anger management. Well, I would ask those therapists how angry would they feel if their child was taken away from them and they were told there was nothing they could do about. 'Just go get a new girlfriend.' 'Put your energy into your work. "You'll get over it.' Why are men treated so differently as if our feelings are either not that deep or not really important?"

"It's not good enough for men to hear from women how they should be any more than it is good for women to hear how they should be from men. We need to take back the search for our identities as fathers, as men in these new times. We have to provide an opportunity for men to talk about their experiences as fathers, that what they feel is real, is valid. We need studies that look at men's experiences. Why aren't there more? Why are people afraid of hearing from a hurting male?"

"I have a very egalitarian viewpoint about how human beings should live together. I'm socialistic, community-responsible...community-oriented rather than individual-oriented. I've always felt that women and men should share opportunities and responsibilities, both in their careers and in their family life. So I've always been positive about feminism, women's rights, that inequalities have to change for when women are not constrained then men are not constrained. One affects the other. So I am discouraged and I guess aghast to hear of men being short changed by the legal system that deals with custody, access, child support. And that this is supported by whatever you want to call them—radical feminist groups. I feel abused by this system, certainly misunderstood, and alone; there aren't any services that exist in our society that is provided to us. That needs to stop."

"I was horrified to read in a magazine that some children are alienated which is long-lasting. That it doesn't just go away once the child is over or moves away from the parent who is really behind this alienation. I have mentioned this to people and they have difficulty hearing that, they don't want to hear that this can and does happen to children. I know that everyone wants things to turn out all right and perhaps they are trying to be optimistic, but I don't believe I will see Celise again."

"I had gone through so much pain, I had essentially shut down. I lost hope of things ever being normal. So, I quit sending cards; Christmas cards, birthday cards, because I never got a response back from her and I began to wonder if they were repulsive to her."

"I now feel as if she is dead...She's dead, she's gone. I no longer have a child."

I asked Tony the same question I had asked the other fathers, "If you could go back in time and knowing what you do now, would you want to become a father. Tony immediately replied, "No." There was a very long silence. I did not say anything. It seemed as if the room had somehow become quieter, even smaller. And then he said again, "No." We shared that moment of knowing what it was like to go through what we had gone through. There was nothing more to say. We sat there looking at one another. We both knew. Tony asked if he could hug me. We stood up and put our arms around each other, two men, two fathers who had hoped for so much for themselves and for their children, but instead had so much taken away. We would never know what it would be like to be the kind of father we aspired to be. Never...

- Tony's Review

"The abbreviated transcript captures this experience in my life. I hope it will aid in helping others understand how being a father and then having that taken away without real justification affects us. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this."

CHAPTER VI

INTERPRETATIONS

Their Story, My Story, Our Story: The Fusion Of The Horizons

Understanding is at the heart of qualitative research. But what do we mean when we say we “understand” or have an “understanding” of something? As I have argued, hermeneutics more than any other qualitative approach makes it clear that understanding is constructed by the researcher’s interpretation of information provided by others. In other words, there is an epistemological relationship between the interpreter (researcher) and the object of interpretation (participants). This does not mean that only the researcher’s pre-knowledge understanding is what determines the final analysis. Nor does it mean that it is solely based on participants’ interpretations. According to Gadamer (1975) all interpretation involves a “tension” between the viewer’s pre-knowledge and that of the other’s interpretation. In the context of the present study, as I seek to understand these four fathers’ viewpoint, or “horizon” as Gadamer refers to it, my initial viewpoint (or horizon) may be challenged. This can force a reformulation of my viewpoint if I maintain what I refer to as a “mindful-reflective” approach so as to not summarily dismiss any father’s competing viewpoint. It is this embracing rather than dismissing or controlling of one’s prejudices and biases that permits the hermeneutical tension and, ultimately, a fuller understanding to occur. Understanding, then, is a negotiation between

differing viewpoints, a process known in hermeneutics as the "fusion of the horizons" (Gadamer, 1975).

After an intense, deep, and thoughtful immersion into these fathers' stories and my own, twelve themes were arrived at. They are situated within four time frames in these fathers' lives: Becoming a Father; Separation and Divorce; Losing Contact; and Rebuilding a Life. Each theme represents a salient lived experience common to these four fathers. Direct quotations from co-researchers will be included to highlight these themes. The reader is asked to keep in mind the following as they review these fathers' stories: First, that the themes are integrally connected to one another. No theme alone fully captures the lived experience of these fathers who have lost contact altogether with their children. Nor do these themes act in isolation. Each one is a part of the wider experience of becoming childless. Second, that this study is but one possible interpretation of the lived experience of divorced fathers who have lost contact with their children. My interpretation, as I have pointed out, is a product of my own historicity. Someone with a different background may interpret these fathers' experience differently. One cannot ignore or simply dismiss another viewpoint simply because it is not the same as one's own. Finally, and related to the previous one, the reader is asked to be aware of his or her own viewpoint or "horizon." If there is "tension" between one's own viewpoint and what was "heard" in these father's stories please consider it in the context of hermeneutical understanding.

Becoming a Father

- Profound Personal Transformation After Their Child's Birth

Prior to their children's birth most of these fathers had no real previous interest in children. As Tony stated, *"In my early twenties I really had no interest in kids."* Likewise, Warren noted, *"I assumed I would have kids of my own some day. I never really thought about it too much though."* Finally, James indicated, he too had not given much thought about having or raising children. *"I'd never really thought about being a father."* Only one father, Ian, was aware of wanting to be fully involved in his children's lives prior to their birth. As Ian remarked, *"I knew I wanted to be involved, emotionally as well as intellectually, in my children's lives."*

For Tony, Warren and James, their interest in children occurred after the birth of their child. But the common experience for all these fathers was a profound personal transformation after the birth of their child. For them, becoming a father gave them a new appreciation of life and of themselves. As James noted, *"I was there in the delivery room. When she was born, I couldn't believe it. It was a pretty incredible experience. I'll never forget it. It changed me; I was a better man for it."* Similarly, Warren stated, *"When [my child] was born something changed in me. It was if I was no longer just concerned with my self, I had a child to take care of, to protect. That was a wake-up call for me."* Even Ian, who knew he wanted to be involved in his children before they were born, was surprised by his reaction. He reflected, *"I was surprised how much her birth affected me. I really had no idea it would change my way of looking at the world, at myself."* Finally, Tony stated, *"Whatever we*

did, I felt as if I was truly alive, that I got to experience the world of discovery all over again." As their stories were told, it was apparent that these men were profoundly moved by the experience of becoming a father. Their world, as stated by Tony, would never be the same. *"You will never look at the world the same way. Never."*

Tony's words below, perhaps best capture what I heard from these fathers, how becoming a father deeply moved them. Tony reflected, *"When my daughter was born I experienced an incredible rejuvenation, a sense of wonder and joy about this experience we call life. I was absolutely astounded about the depth of my feelings. In my early twenties I really had no interest in kids. And there I was at age thirty-three experiencing a tremendous transformation in my life, all because of a new born baby."* For these fathers, they could not imagine not being a father. It had, as Warren stated, moved them to look beyond their own needs; "rejuvenated" them, as Tony noted; challenged them to be, as James indicated, a "better man," giving them a new appreciation for life. For these men, becoming a father was, as Ian noted, *"...the most rewarding time in my life... I cannot think of any other activity that would have brought me more pleasure and fulfillment... What I experienced when I became a parent, a father, is almost indescribable."*

The birth of their children had a profound impact on these four fathers. Even after all that had happened between that event and the present, they all recalled quite vividly experiencing a change within themselves. Their world, their "horizon," and ultimately they would, indeed, never be the same.

- Commitment To Raise Their Children Within The Original Nuclear Family

Once they had become a parent these fathers were committed to raising their children within the existing nuclear family structure, that is, with the child's mother. For them there was no question that they were now a family and that it was in the child's best interest as well as the parents that there were two, not one parents. As Tony said, *"I've seen quite a few single parent families and, yes, a single parent can raise a child but not what I believe is the best way to do so... A parent needs support, not just calling someone and venting about being a parent or having someone come over and take care of the kids for a few hours while they go shopping. It is someone who is there, right now, who can help them immediately, can provide immediate support... This is what's best for kids."* James, likewise, stated, *"There's no way I'd want to be a single parent. You need two people, the kid's real parents, to raise them. A kid does best when both parents are there. I was glad I had both my parents. It felt like a family."* As Ian commented, *"Everyone I know who was raised in a single or divorced family really wished both their parents were together. It's as if there is something genetic about a child wanting to grow up with both parents there."* Finally, as Warren stated, *"I could probably raise a kid on my own, but why? Why would anyone want to do that?... Kids need two parents. Their mother and their real father...that is how I was going to raise my kids."*

For these fathers, the family they were are part of, helped create through marriage and the birth of a child, was central in how they wanted to care for their

children. There was no question in their minds; they wanted to raise their children in a family structure that was comprised of the biological parents.

- Sense Of Competence As A Fully Involved Parent

As these fathers took on the role of an involved parent they quickly became aware of their ability to competently do so. Warren commented, *"At first I was quite nervous, wondering if I was doing the right thing. I'd phone my Mom and she'd tell me how to do this or give me advise on how to do that. After awhile I realized I wasn't doing a bad job. It felt OK."* Ian recalled, *"I met a number of other Dads who shared their stories, providing me with an opportunity to compare notes... see how they did things with their kids. After awhile you begin to have this sense of competence, that you can do it, you can take care of your child."* Tony, likewise, stated, *"I'd meet other fathers who were doing the same sort of thing as I was. We'd trade stories, see how they did things with their kids, and support one another as being this "New Age" father. We were raising our children."* Finally, James said, *"If someone had said to me, 'Hey, can you take care of a baby?' let alone a child before I became a parent I would have said, 'That's what Mom's are for.' Not now, I know how to take care of a kid. And I can do it very well."*

As time went on their sense of competence grew. They felt comfortable dressing their child, could change a diaper, feed their child, sooth them when they were upset, give them baths, and help put them to bed. As Warren noted, *"After awhile you begin to see that other than providing breast milk, there's not much a mother can do that a father can't do... and I felt very comfortable in doing those things."*

Perhaps the biggest challenge for them was playing with an infant. As James indicated, *"When I used to think of babies and infants, I'd picture the Mom or Grandmother playing with them. Not so much the Dad. At first I felt kind of funny making noises and faces but after awhile it's easy to do, and kind of fun."*

As their children grew older this initial base of competency set the stage for them to feel comfortable to help with the emotional life of their children. As Ian noted, *"Once you've done the basic things of taking care of an infant you feel that you can do anything... The mechanics of riding a bike is easy; being supportive, teaching them in a constructive way involves being aware of and engaging them in their emotional world. That's where I think today's Dads are different than say my Dad's generation. We are more involved in our kid's emotional world."*

Tony perhaps best captured this new sense of competency when he said, *"Being a listener, a nurturer is normally not ascribed to men, but we are very capable of doing this. The rules have changed for men the past twenty years so that they have an opportunity to explore a part of themselves that North American culture has for a long time said, 'No, this is not what it means to be a man. You must act this way.' Now we are asked, given permission, to participate fully in our children's lives. And we do because we can... Men, given the opportunity, can competently raise their children."*

These four fathers had been given permission by a culture to become fully involved in their children's lives. And as they told their stories about parenting it was apparent they did so with a growing belief in and appreciation of themselves as competent parents.

Separation and Divorce

- Wanting To Do What Was Best For Their Child Despite Problems With Their Ex

Each of the fathers in this study was very upset and angry when the separation occurred in their marriage. They were upset and angry at their estranged partners for a number of reasons. First, they were upset the primary family unit was being broken up. Family, to them, was everything. It provides a sense of belonging, of continuity, of a shared commitment between members. And importantly, for them, it was within that context that a child should be raised. As Tony stated, *"A child does best within a family of two parents, the biological parents... and there she was, breaking up the family... how could she do this to our child?"* Ian, likewise, stated, *"I couldn't see how splitting up was going to be good for [our child]. Maybe for her in a selfish way, but certainly not for [our child]."*

Second, they were upset their marriage had come apart. Like their notion of family, a marriage was a commitment, not just while it was convenient, but for a lifetime. As Warren recalled, *"I was extremely upset when she left... I didn't know what to do. I was upset about our marriage coming apart... It was a commitment I took very seriously. You just didn't leave it when things got a bit rough... I was so pissed off at her for doing that. Not only to me but to the kids."* James, too, stated, *"She just bailed when it was convenient for her and with no consideration for how [our child] felt."*

Despite, as the above quotes illustrate, being upset with their estranged partner these fathers were ultimately concerned about their children's welfare.

This meant setting aside their feelings towards their estranged partner and finding a way to work with them to best meet the needs of their child. As James best said it, *“I was really angry at my ex for leaving and taking our kid with her, and that she seemed to call all the shots, but you have to work with the way things are and kind of hold your tongue and try and make it work. She certainly didn’t... I just wanted to be able to see my daughter. I had hoped we could work something out that was OK for [our daughter] and the both of us.”* Ian reflected the same thoughts. *“To say I was angry is a bit of an understatement. She broke up the marriage without, in my opinion, giving me an opportunity to try and work the problem out with her. And she took our daughter. But I needed to be there for her and so kept my thoughts about this to myself, ignored her caustic remarks, and tried to find a way to work with her.”* Tony likewise stated, *“Arguing about things would not have helped an already difficult situation.”* And finally, Warren noted, *“I used to get angry that I had to abide by her rules, that I was the one having to make the sacrifices to see the kids, but I just wanted to see them so I set my feelings aside.”*

While to these fathers it did not seem fair that they were restricted as to when they could see their children they continued to try and work cooperatively with the children’s mother. They were resolved, as their comments above indicate, to make the best of it and not make an already difficult situation any more difficult.

- Continued Commitment To Being A Fully Involved Parent

Each of these fathers was committed to continuing to be fully involved in their children's lives after their separation and divorce. Each made significant sacrifices so they could spend time with their children. Warren would fly across the country to see his children, which cost him a lot financially. But as he said, *"There was no question about flying out to see them. They're my kids. If I had to I would have left my job to be near them."* Ian took a part-time job that was flexible enough to allow him to pick up his daughter after school and spend a few hours with her before her mother arrived to pick her up. It, too, was financially challenging, but as he said, *"I didn't have a lot of money, but I didn't really care. I wanted to share this incredible learning experience called life with my daughter."* And Tony would commute to the Mainland by ferry, pick up his daughter, take her back to his home, arriving just in time for bed, spend Saturday with her, then take her back to the Lower Mainland by ferry on the Sunday, and then return home. Like the other fathers, there was no question as to what he should do. *"When you become a parent you are committing yourself to that child, to teach it to be a responsible individual, to provide a safe home, to nurture it, to love it. There was no question, whatsoever, as to what I should do."* Trying to be involved with their children was difficult and there were many obstacles—financial, geographical, and emotional. But as James stated, *"It was hard at first, you know. Picking up your kid at a certain time, then dropping them off at a certain time. But once I got used to it I made the best of it... when I got [my kid] I would just do everything with her."*

Each of these fathers continued to see their children at the designated times. It was difficult on them financially, professionally, physically, and emotionally. But they made the best of a very difficult situation, never wavering from their commitment to being fully involved in their children's lives. *"Many fathers make huge sacrifices to see their kids. And fathers don't make a big stink about it; they just do what has to be done for their kids."* – Warren

Losing Contact

- Profound Sense Of Confusion

Each of these fathers described a profound sense of confusion when they could no longer see their children. The sense of confusion stemmed from the discrepancy between their beliefs there were not any significant problems and being informed their child no longer wanted to see them. As James said, *"I'm seeing my kid when I'm suppose to, making the support payments, helping out when I can, staying out of [the ex-wife's way, so what's the problem?]"* Warren, likewise, said, *"I thought everything was OK. I had a good relationship with the kids. No real problems. And what was her problem? She had the kids, I was living in another province and so I'm out of her hair. Always made support payments, took care of the kids dental stuff. And I only saw the kids a few times a year. How tough can that be on her? ... And then I'm no longer wanted. It didn't make any sense to me. Still doesn't."* Ian voiced similar dismay, *"I always thought [my child] and I got along very well. As far as I remember there weren't any big problems between us. Sure, there was some tension between [the child's mom] and me, but nothing that warranted what happened."* Finally, Tony

stated, *"I couldn't understand why my daughter did not want to see me. We had a very close relationship. Then, all of a sudden she doesn't want to see me. It didn't make sense. When I tried to talk to [her mother] about this... I was suddenly frozen out... my wife had the telephone disconnected. I couldn't get a hold of them. It was extremely confusing... I didn't know how to interpret this. It didn't make sense."*

- Profound Sense Of Injustice

The courts did not alleviate this sense of confusion as they tried to find out why their children no longer wanted to see them. All of these fathers sought legal advice and were informed that at a certain age (usually around age 11-12) a child could decide whether or not they wanted to see the non-custodial parent. As Ian recalled, *"I sought legal advice and, like the counsellors I saw, was informed that a child could decide if they wanted to see or not see the non-custodial parent. I felt I was losing her and no one could help me nor seemed to care... [The mother's] legal rights certainly superseded mine. Essentially I had little or no rights as a father."* Warren, who took the issue to court, was met with the same, *"The judge who heard the case stated that they were of an age where they could decide if and when they saw the non-custodial parent. I couldn't believe it... What about my rights as a parent?"*

This sense of injustice was further exacerbated when they were still obligated to continue to make child support payments. As Ian stated, *"I was still legally required to pay for child support even though I no longer saw her. It wasn't about the money. I know some people believe it to be about this. But it wasn't. It was about the injustice; your child's relationship can be maliciously taken from you, but you will*

continue to pay the person who did this. How fair or right is that?" James also stated, "You're told there is nothing you can do about your kid not wanting to see you, but, hey, still make that payment or else you'll be thrown in jail...It's OK for [her] Mom to mess with her head but I'll go to jail if I don't pay for that. Oh yeah, that's fair."

"I am discouraged and I guess aghast to hear of men being short changed by the legal system that deals with custody, access, child support... I feel abused by this system, certainly misunderstood, and alone." - Tony

- Profound Sense Of Loss

With no legal recourse available, these fathers experienced a profound sense of loss. As Ian commented, *"I have never experienced that type of loss. Even when my father passed away, that loss was different; he had lived a good life and there's a part of you that understands that this is normal, something that we all must face in life. But having your child taken away from you, having a legal system which says there is nothing you can do... My whole being felt as if it had been ripped apart."*

Warren, James, and Tony voiced the same thoughts. As Tony described it, *"My soul [was] ripped apart. And I had to act normal, as if nothing was wrong...And no matter what I did or what people said the pain, the grief would not go away. It put a hole in my heart that would not heal."* Warren likewise said, *"It felt as if someone had taken a knife and stabbed me in the heart. I felt that loss physically as well as emotionally."*

And James recalled, *"How do you describe that kind of loss to someone. You feel it. You live it. It's with you all the time. But how do you describe what it actually feels like?"*

Ian sought therapeutic help for this loss, but found the experience only exacerbated his feelings of it. As he recalled, *"My feelings of loss were turned against me in therapy... Why would man spend so much time, effort and money to see his child was what I was hearing from them. Was I just trying to be another "controlling" male or was there something else, more sinister?"*

Tony also went to therapy. As he described it, *"As I tried to deal with my loss I found that how men should be responding to this loss... was largely written from a female perspective. Even therapy had the bias. It was about anger management. I would ask those therapists how angry would they feel if their child was taken away from them and they were told there was nothing they could do about. 'Just go get a new girlfriend.' 'Put your energy into your work.' 'You'll get over it.' Why are men treated so differently as if our feelings are either not that deep or not really important?"*

James moved to a new city. *"I had to get away from [that town]...So I applied for a transfer, got it, packed up and moved. That helped. But it still hurt a lot."* Warren and Ian were both placed on anti-depressants. As Warren recalled, *"I saw my doctor and he put me on anti-depressants. They helped a bit, but what? Help me to accept that my kids were being taken away from me and there was nothing, absolutely nothing that I could do?"*

- Profound Sense Of Hopelessness

All four fathers expressed this profound sense of hopelessness. As highlighted before, the courts could not help them and their efforts at dealing with their loss were largely unsuccessful. It appeared as if nothing would ever

change their situation. As Warren stated, *"Once you have tried everything possible to see your kids again, at least find out what happened, and nothing comes of it, what is there to do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And if there is nothing more you can do you lose hope. I lost hope."* James and Ian echoed the same thoughts. James stated, *"I used to cry, and I'm not a crier, but I used to cry a lot. Everything felt so unfair. And there was nothing I could do."* Likewise, Ian reported, *"Essentially, I had given up hope that I would ever see her again."* As Tony said, *"I had gone through so much pain, I had essentially shut down. I lost hope of things ever being normal."*

- Profound Sense Of Isolation

With no legal recourse available to them, their efforts to alleviate their loss unsuccessful, and the hope they would ever see their children again diminished, these four fathers experienced a profound sense of isolation from the world. They continued to go to work, see family and friends, pursue recreational activities, but as Ian stated, *"I felt detached from everything. I went to work, would do things with friends, but I felt alone. No one knows what you're going through, can't know what you're going through, and so you are alone with your thoughts and feelings."*

Warren expressed the same sense of aloneness. *"How do you tell anyone what happened? The few times I did I felt like it wasn't taken seriously. My life had come apart and no one seems to understand."* James, too, reported he felt he could not say anything and felt alone. *"I'd try and tell people what happened and then I started getting the look, you know...So I didn't say anything."* Finally, Tony expressed a view that society fosters this isolation. *"I feel abused by this system, certainly*

misunderstood, and alone; there aren't any services that exist in our society that is provided to us... Why are people afraid of hearing from a hurting male?"

- Going Nowhere: A Life In Limbo

Each of these fathers described of feeling that their lives were on hold. As Ian recalled, *"[My life for seven years was] on hold, not going forward, not going anywhere really. Stuck in a quagmire of grief, shame and guilt."* Warren stated, *"It felt like I was stuck, in this blackness that wouldn't go away,"* and that they could not move out of it. As Warren continued, *"I felt like I had to do something about all of this, but there was nothing I could do... so I did nothing."* These fathers all recalled this feeling of limbo lasting for a number of years. James recalled, *"I felt stuck for years. It just wouldn't go away."* Tony also remembered, *"Years and years went by. I thought I would always feel this way."*

They had lost contact with their children. Their lives were essentially on hold. These four fathers felt that their profound experience of loss, despair, and isolation would, as Tony expressed above, never go away. However...

Rebuilding a Life

- Becoming Childless: Saying Goodbye To The Dream

With no contact with their children these fathers began to slowly disengage from acting and feeling like parents. Eventually they stopped sending cards on important occasions as they were never acknowledged. As Tony remembered, *"I quit sending cards; Christmas cards, birthday cards, because I never*

got a response back from her and I began to wonder if they were repulsive to her." Photos of their children came down from walls and out of wallets; they were too painful of a reminder of what they went through. Ian recalled, "One day I found I could no longer look at a photo I had of her. I remember thinking to myself, 'I have to put this away, I can't look at it anymore."

These fathers found themselves not talking about their children. As James stated, *"I started to not talk about not only what happened, but about her. It was as if she didn't exist. People would ask me questions about her—what's she doing, that sort of thing—and I'd make stuff up. Partially because I didn't know, but also because she didn't seem real. Eventually she wasn't real."* Ian, too, had a similar experience. *"After awhile I no longer mentioned that I had a daughter and that I didn't see her...Over time she seemed more and more like a distant memory."* Warren, likewise, felt the memory of being a father slipping away, *"After a while, it didn't seem real, that I was a father. It became 'I used to be a father' and then one day I thought, 'I am no longer a father.'"*

Over the years their memories of being a father became increasingly dream-like. Slowly they began to think of themselves as not being fathers. As Ian recalled, *"It was a process that took a very long time. Essentially, I had given up hope that I would ever see her again and to deal with that pain, that loss, to get on with my life, I needed to let go. One day it just felt like I was no longer a father."* Warren came to a similar decision as he could no longer wait for his situation to change. As he said, *"Who doesn't try to see their kids? What kind of person gives up on seeing their*

kids? But you know, I've waited and waited. I just can't wait anymore. It hurts too much to wait."

Eventually, they no longer felt they had a child. Tony said, *"I now feel as if she is dead...She's dead, she's gone. I no longer have a child."* Ian said, *"I had this memory of being [a father] at one time in my life, but it feels more like a dream. I no longer consider myself a father...I no longer have a child."* James said, *"Do I feel like a father? I don't have a kid so no."* And finally Warren said, *"I've waited and waited. I just can't wait anymore. It hurts too much to wait."*

- Looking Back: Forgoing Fatherhood

Towards the end of the interview I asked each of these four fathers the following question: "If you could go back in time and knowing what you know now, all that you have experienced, would you want to have children?" It always became very quiet after I asked *that* question. The room, too, seemed as if it got smaller. How were they going to respond? How was I going to react? Each father's verbal response was as moving as the previous one. Each father's nonverbal response was as intense as the previous one. It always took several minutes before we moved on to any further conversation.

I had asked the question in the pilot study and the father whom I interviewed said, *"Of course"* as he held out the hope that he would eventually see his child again. 'Of course' is what most people would assume. 'Your kids are always your kids, no matter what' is what I have heard almost everyone who is a parent—fathers and mothers alike—say in response to that question. But, as we

have seen, these were fathers who did not share a life with their children, who believed they would never see their children again. How would they respond? How would I respond? How will you, the reader, respond?

Ian *"You asked me if I could go back in time and could decide whether or not I would choose to be a father,... I would have to say no."*

Warren *"Would I have children again?" "Yes,"* replied Warren. There was a pause, as if he was thinking about that. I asked him what was going on for him. He replied, *" I said yes and then I thought about it because as I said it [my response] didn't feel right. Guess I was saying what everyone expects you to say about your kids. You'll always be there for them, you'll always love them... Actually, no, I wouldn't want to have kids if I could go back in time and do it again. I've paid too big of a price. And I'm not just talking about money. It wasn't worth it."*

James *"If I could go back in time would I have had children? I'd have to say no. You have no rights as a father. None. Thanks for the sperm, be on your way. That's how it feels... I never want to go through that again... It hurt way too much."*

Tony *"No."* A single word response from someone who was never at a loss for words. There was a very long silence. Everything seemed to stop moving in the room... and then he said again, *"No."*

I will never forget that moment with Tony. I will always remember James', Warren's, and Ian's responses. It spoke of dreams that would never be, of lives that were shattered. It is, to them, an injustice that is too late to be righted and a loss that will never be regained.

This process of becoming what I term "childless" occurred over many years. It would take some more time, but once they saw themselves as such they began to see that their lives could move on. Warren and James have remarried since that time, both to women who have children. Ian has been in a steady relationship for a number of years; his partner has no children. Tony, to this day, remains by himself.

None of these men have had a child since losing contact with their own children.

None of them ever want to.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

Unique Findings

As of this writing there is no research on the lived experience of fathers who have lost contact with their children and have lost hope that they would ever see them again. This study is unique, then, as it gives a voice to these fathers' experience. While it may be of no surprise to hear that they were committed to being fully involved parents in their children's lives before separating with their children's mother, that they were profoundly hurt when they lost contact with their children, what is perhaps the unique finding of this study is that they felt they had to do the unthinkable: to let go of being a parent in order for their lives to move on. To become, as I have seen and heard them painfully describe, "childless."

In my conversations with parents, both mothers and fathers, divorced and married, and parents who have lost a child, this concept of "becoming childless" is quite literally inconceivable, bordering on being anathema. 'How could a parent not want to see their child?' 'How could a parent give up hope of ever seeing their child?' 'How could a parent ever see himself or herself as not being a parent?'

A parent's "worst nightmare" is often used to describe losing a child. Most of us do not truly know what that experience is like. How can we, unless we, too, have experienced that profound loss. We cannot. However, we can

empathize, relating to our own experiences of loss and comparing that with what we would be experiencing if we lost our child: our worst nightmare. However, this empathy is difficult for many towards fathers who have let go of seeing themselves as a parent, as if letting go of your parentage crosses some kind of instinctive, almost sacred line.

The purpose of this study, though, was to give a voice to fathers who have found themselves crossing that line, regardless of how upsetting this might be to others. Twenty years ago I could not have imagined not seeing myself as a parent as I watched my child born into the world and as I held her in my hands. But my experience of losing contact with my child changed my horizon. The same can be said of these fathers: none of them ever imagined they would not be a parent when they became fathers. But it did happen to them and as the study illustrates this experience profoundly affected their horizons.

The hermeneutical approach to understanding the lived experience of these fathers was, I strongly believe, the best approach from which to explore this topic. These fathers watched me very carefully at first. They had been judged too often and too harshly for what had happened between themselves and their children; the 'You must have done something really bad to have your kid not want to see you.' As well, they had been isolated in their eventually letting go of their children; the inconceivable almost anathema option. They did not need any more judgement in their lives. When I explained that I, too, had lost contact with my child they visibly relaxed their guard; I would know what they were going to

tell me, I was “one of them.” Far from biasing my hearing of their story, the hermeneutical approach helped me to hear their story from an insider’s point of view. My task was to convey what I was hearing from them. This is what I believe was accomplished. Becoming childless, an otherwise unknown concept, is a reality for these fathers. It is this concept that is unique to this study.

Limitations

Qualitative research is often criticized by quantitative researchers for not using representative samples, not using reliable (in the positivistic sense) measures, not controlling for researcher biases, and not yielding replicable findings. As previously discussed, though, in Chapter III: Research Paradigm, qualitative research is based on entirely different epistemological and ontological assumptions compared to quantitative research, which many feel that validity criteria of the quantitative perspective are therefore inappropriate.

Every study’s methodology—whether positivistic or naturalistic—has limitations that are a threat to validity. If, however, there is no universal agreement as to what constitutes such a threat to qualitative research, let alone that multiple interpretations of any experience are possible, how can we determine the validity of any study?

What becomes most important in determining the validity of a particular study and, conversely, its limitations, is to employ the optimal methodological technique, to be methodologically consistent throughout the process, and to critically present the research process in detail. This I have strenuously

endeavoured to do. In particular, I have striven to be as clear and as open to the reader as to what my "horizon" was, why I chose the hermeneutical research methodology for this study and the philosophical foundation that the methodology is based upon, the data collection process, the stories of participants, and my interpretations of it. The importance of explicating "how we claim to know what we know" is as essential as the claim to what we know.

What is apparent throughout this research process is that validity in qualitative research is dependant on transparency. Having said that, though, and believing I have endeavoured to be as transparent as possible, this alone cannot guarantee validity. Findings must invite the opportunity for critical reflection by consumers. Searching for alternative explanations is imperative and welcomed. This scrutiny will be an important test of this study's validity. One very important consumer group—the actual participants in this study—have indeed validated the study's findings.

Implications for Research

The body of research on the effects of divorce has not given much attention to the experience of fathers, let alone those who have lost contact with their children altogether. As I mentioned previously, a search done on Dissertation Abstract International as well as on PsycINFO and other related information bases revealed no discernable studies on fathers who have lost contact with their children.

This study revealed a story worthy of investigation. Indeed, it illuminated the experience of a disadvantaged group—the fathers in this study—who have been largely ignored by the legal and therapeutic communities, let alone society in general. In an era of giving minority groups a voice, their voices have been strangely missing. If we, the academic community, tout the emancipation of the disadvantage and marginalized groups then these fathers deserve more attention. Indeed, if the current socio-political-legal environment supports policies that hinder the rights of any minority group—such as these fathers—to have an equitable relationship with their children—as do mothers—then this inequity is deserving of a more critical examination. To not do so, to remain silent, would be to condone an unjust status quo. It is my hope that this study will open the door to further studies of this issue and be a starting point in, hopefully, changing a situation that is simply not fair.

This study also supports the concept of the Parental Alienation Syndrome. Although there is no “first-hand” evidence to support it, the stories of these fathers suggest that their children were subjected to this process. These fathers described a very close and involved relationship with their child that was unexplainably and suddenly terminated. The Parental Alienation Syndrome describes this rejection by children of the non-custodial parent and if left unchallenged the relationship is terminated. This final rejection is indeed what happened to these fathers. Further research into the experiences of such fathers may help to fuller illuminate how the Parental Alienation Syndrome operates.

Implications for Counselling and Psychotherapy

In my personal and professional discussions with fathers who have either lost contact with their children altogether or only get to see their children every other weekend (or some similar arrangement), their experience with the therapeutic community has not been a positive one. Those divorced fathers who attended therapy have informed me that the therapeutic community paid little if any attention to their plight. Indeed, as two of the study's fathers expressed, the therapeutic community minimized their feelings of loss as they struggled to adapt to their children no longer living with them and, related, how the courts dictated when they could see them. As one of the study's fathers expressed, "Why are men treated so differently [by the therapeutic community] as if [their] feelings are either not that deep or not really important?"

As this study has illustrated, though, these fathers suffer tremendously. It is, therefore, the therapeutic community's responsibility and obligation to treat these fathers with the same respect they show others who have experienced a loss. To not do so is simply a violation of their ethical code.

In my conversations with many fathers there is little, if any, therapeutic help for fathers who are experiencing a diminishing relationship with their children or who have lost contact with their children altogether. While support groups for fathers experiencing divorce do exist they largely deal with providing legal advice. Although individual therapy could be sought for these issues, there are no therapists in Victoria known to myself that specialize in this form of loss.

Sadly instead, as the fathers of this study attested to, the therapeutic community has not been helpful. As this study has illustrated, one of the major themes for such fathers is the sense of isolation. A therapeutic support group would help these fathers deal with this debilitating experience. Likewise, the other themes described in this study—feelings of loss, injustice, confusion, and hopelessness—could be addressed in a supportive group environment.

One of the purposes of this study was to bring a real human voice to this experience. This can, I believe, help inform the therapeutic community about the importance of fatherhood to divorce fathers and what happens to them when this is either taken away from them or their time spent with their children is significantly reduced.

This study has had a significant impact upon me professionally. Although I am no stranger to the issue of loss in therapy, I feel strangely more at ease as I listen to clients' stories of loss. My own loss was hidden in my personal life; I, like the fathers in this study, sought to protect myself from "accusing" eyes. But now it is "out of the closet" and in joining with these fathers' experience it has helped free up emotional as well as physical energy as I am no longer spending it to keep it a secret anymore. Not that I declare to clients or anyone else for that matter that I have lost contact with my own child, but I no longer feel it is a shameful secret that I must somehow keep hidden from others. This serendipitous effect of the study on myself has been, perhaps, the most important benefit for me, both personally and professionally.

Implications for Praxis

Is research merely knowledge generation or does it seek to challenge and ultimately change social problems? Praxis and research are, in my opinion, inextricably connected. As I have stated from the outset, I am not merely interested in "knowledge for knowledge's sake." Qualitative research rejects the notion of a dispassionate and disengaged research self. My intentions, too, are quite explicit: the social and legal injustices experienced by divorced fathers should be equitably reconstructed, not merely talked about. A neutral research position will, at best, offer an interesting academic study and, at worst, simply maintain the status quo. Research that explores injustices in society either implicitly or explicitly seeks, as one of its purposes of inquiry, to change those injustices. This study seeks to change the status quo regarding the rights of fathers as they continue to be a parent after their marriage has ended.

Change is more often than naught slow. However, it occurs because of the power of the voice; the voice of the disadvantaged and the voice of those who actively engage with them, directly or indirectly, to change the status quo. This study gives a research voice to those fathers who have experienced the loss of contact with their children. I welcome fathers' rights group to use this study to help illustrate the profound effect losing contact with a child has on a father. With enough voices this injustice cannot be ignored.

Closing Thoughts

The parental role of fathers has undergone significant changes in the past quarter century. No longer asked or restricted to being the breadwinner alone, fathers have embraced a new parental identity and a more nurturing/emotional relationship with their children. This was supposed to be the Golden Age of Fatherhood.

Despite this touted welcome change by the media, the mental health community, and society in general, divorced fathers have not been treated equally as mothers regarding custody and access of their children after divorce. As mentioned previously, in Canada mothers are awarded sole custody in half of all cases. Where joint custody is awarded (40% of all settlements) the mother is typically awarded primary residence with fathers typically restricted in their "allocated" times. Overtime, contact tends to decrease and for some, as this study has shown, access to their children has been lost altogether.

Studies have continually shown that the caring involvement from both parents, whether divorced or married, best meets the needs of children. This study is not advocating that fathers be given sole custody in half of all cases or be given primary residence in half of all joint custody arrangements. If two adults have children and for whatever reason end their relationship, they have a responsibility to their children that they have an unencumbered relationship with both parents. This, in my opinion, is acting in the best interest of children. It is not an easy task, but to continue to "do business" as is will only leave more

losers than winners. It is not just the alienated parent who suffers. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends also suffer. Indeed, in my casual conversations with people I am surprised at how many have experienced losing contact with a niece, a nephew, a stepchild, and a grandchild. Finally, the children who are compelled to no longer see the alienated parents suffer. Half of their family is robbed from them.

The current situation cannot continue as is; the costs to society far outweigh any short-term benefits of convenience. This means finding ways to share parenting. At the least, it means not punishing the non-custodial parent with restricted access times and punitive support payments.

This study is but one step in many that will be needed to change this legal and social imbalance. We, as a society, have far to go. In an era where minority rights are championed it is easy to look the other way when it involves fathers. Hopefully, the insight into these fathers' lived experience of profound loss after losing not only contact but also any hope of ever seeing their children again, will engender compassion and, in turn, help inform and sensitize our legal, therapeutic, and research communities as well as the general public. It is an invitation that challenges long-held horizons of privileges. Hopefully, though, it will foster compassion and opens up the possibility for horizons to change.

APPENDIX A: Application for Ethical Review of Human Research

University of Victoria
Office of the Vice-President, Research
Human Research Ethics Committee

Application for Ethical Review of Human Research

Instructions:

1. Use the *Ethics Applications Guidelines* to complete this form. The Guidelines and all other forms are available on the Office of the Vice-President, Research web site:

<http://www.research.uvic.ca/Forms/>

2. Submit one (1) original and three (3) copies to Office of the Vice-President, Research.
Handwritten applications will not be processed.

3. Use the attached *Participant Consent Form Template* to construct your consent form.

4. If you downloaded this file, you can complete it on your computer.

A. Applicant Information

Principal Investigator: **Zane Kirby Shannon** E-Mail: zshannon@uvic.ca
Department: **Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies** Phone: (250) xxx-xxxx
Mailing Address: **xxxx Victoria, B.C.**

Are you: Faculty Staff Graduate Student Undergraduate Student

If you are a student:

Supervisor: Name of **Dr. Geoffrey Hett** E-Mail: hettg@uvic.ca
Department: **Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies** Phone: 721-7783

B. Project Information

Project Title: **Becoming Childless: A Hermeneutical Exploration of the Voices of Fathers Who Have Lost Contact With Their Children**
Keywords: 1. fathers 2. divorce 3. Hermeneutics 4. parent-child relationship
Geographic location of study: **Victoria, British Columbia**

Is this a class project? No Yes *Note: A class project application is normally submitted by an instructor who is teaching a research course and whose students will be conducting a mini research project for the course.*

Have you applied for funding for this project? No Yes (If "yes", complete the following.)

Source(s) of funding:

Exact title of grant(s):

Other Investigators on this project:

Name	Institutional Affiliation	E-mail address
N/A		

Employees (e.g., research assistants) should not be listed as investigators. If investigators change, inform the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Proposed Start **October 25, 2004** (allow 4-6 weeks for review)
 Date:

<i>For Office of Vice-President, Research Use Only:</i>		VPR File Number: 	
Date	Sent to	Returned	To
Received:	Rev1:	Rev1:	Chair:
	Sent to	Returned	Notice
	Rev2:	Rev2:	:
Committee Chair Approval			Date:
Signature: _____			
Start Date:		Annual review date: _____	
Funding source reference info:			

C. Signatures

Your signature indicates that you agree to abide by all policies, procedures, regulations and laws governing the ethical conduct of research involving humans. Policies and procedures can be found on the Office of the Vice-President, Research web site: <http://www.research.uvic.ca/>

Principal _____ Date: _____
 Investigator: _____

The signature of the supervisor below indicates that the supervisory committee has reviewed and approved the student's proposal and that the supervisor has assisted the student in the preparation of this application.

Student's _____ Date: _____
 Supervisor: _____

The signature of the administrator indicates that adequate research infrastructure is available to conduct this research.

Chair/Director or _____ Date: _____
 Dean: _____

D. Level of Risk

The Tri-Council definition of "minimal risk" is the following:

The research can be regarded as within the range of minimal risk if potential participants can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude

of possible harms implied by participation in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the participant in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research. The designation of minimal or non-minimal levels of risk only affects the way the application is reviewed, not the substance of the ethical review.

Based on this definition, do you believe your research qualifies as "minimal risk research"?

- No
 Yes (If "yes", please explain your answer below.)

Research will be conducted with voluntary participants who will be fully functioning adults. Potential participants will be fully informed of the study's overall purpose and process through an Invitation To Participate pamphlet that will be available. Informed consent to participate in the study will be obtained. The Participant Consent Form for actual participants will also outline the purpose and process of the study. Participants are free to remove themselves from the study at any time without question. For the most part, participants experience interviews as positive experiences. Being able to give voice to one's lived experience, especially if it has had a profound effect upon one's life, can be rewarding. The highly personal and intimate nature of hermeneutic interviews, however, can also engender upsetting thoughts and feelings as the interviewee reflects upon painful aspects of their lived experience. While such feelings are not uncommon and are perhaps to be expected, the researcher needs to be cognizant of the possible consequences of the interview process on informants. Researchers need to be sensitive to the questions that are asked, the tone of the interview, and the emotionality of the interviewee. Above all else, researchers need to ensure participants are not left distressed after talking about sensitive topics. Hence, following each interview and throughout the duration of the participant's involvement in the study I will be available to debrief and provide support as necessary.

E. Scholarly Review

Many research projects must undergo scholarly review. What type of scholarly review has this research undergone?

- None
 External Peer Review (e.g., granting agency)
 Supervisory Committee (required for all student research projects)
 Special Review (explain below)

F. Research Project Information

The following information is required by the Committee to review the ethics of your research. Items marked by * must be included as part of the process of informed consent for participants. Researchers are encouraged to adapt the information provided to the Committee for the consent form and process (see the attached "Prototype Participant Consent Form").

The use of lay language is required. Use the space provided. If more information must be provided, append an additional page and label with the appropriate heading.

- 1. What are the purposes and objectives of your research?

The purpose of the research is to explore and give voice to fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children due to separation or divorce. The primary objectives are, (1) to provide a scholarly study that advances knowledge in an area where a research vacuum currently exists, and (2) sensitize and inform legal, therapeutic, and research communities as well as the general public about the importance of fatherhood to fathers who are divorced.

- * 2. Why is this research important? What contributions will it make?

This research is important because it breaks ground in an area of parent/child relation that has, to date, received little, if any, scholarly attention despite the significant number of fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children after a relationship breakdown.

G. Participants

- 3a. How will you recruit participants?

By letter (enclose a copy) By telephone (enclose the script)
By advertisement (enclose a copy)

Through another organization or a third party (e.g., school records)

Enclose evidence of permission to use these organizations or third parties in recruitment.

Other (please describe below)

* 3b. How will participants be selected? In the space below, provide the description you will use in the consent process to inform participants of why and how they were selected for inclusion in the study.

Participants will be obtained through the Victoria Men's Centre. The Centre will be forwarding to its members the Invitation To Participate pamphlet via their Group email list. The pamphlet will also be made available at the Centre. This invitation outlines the purpose and process of the study and the requirements of potential participants. I will ask for volunteers who meet the following main requirements, (1) that they have lost contact with their children after a separation or divorce, (2) that the loss of contact was not of their choosing, and (3) that prior to losing contact they considered themselves to be emotionally invested in their child's life. The Invitation To Participate pamphlet will

include an outline of the above. Interested participants will be asked to contact me by telephone, at which time they will have an opportunity to privately discuss in greater detail the purpose and process of the study and the appropriateness of their inclusion.

4a. The competence and ability of potential participants to make informed decisions about whether to participate is an important consideration. Describe your prospective participants:

- Competent adults Incompetent adults
 Competent children/youth Incompetent children/youth
 A protected or vulnerable population (e.g., inmates, patients)

4b. Provide details of the types of participants who will be included in the study (e.g., numbers, gender, age, position).

Participants will all be adult males. They will all be fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children after marital/relationship breakdown. Between four and six participants will be recruited. Age and occupation will not be a consideration for this study.

5. If participants will/may not be able to provide consent for themselves, how will you gain consent?

See the Ethics Application Guidelines for further detail if your research involves children.

N/A

H. Procedures

• 6a. Which of the following will the participants be expected to complete? (check all that apply)

- be interviewed individually complete a questionnaire participate in a group interview
 be observed provide human tissue (e.g., blood, hair, DNA, gametes)
 provide access to records or other personal materials
 Other (specify below)

6b. Provide details to your answer in 6a (e.g., name of questionnaire, source of documents, type of task).

In an appendix, provide sample interview questions, copies of instruments, or examples of questionnaire items.

I will be using a semi-structured interview technique. This method of life story exploration exists somewhere between the casual atmosphere of the unstructured interview, where the researcher and participant engage in an exchange of ideas regarding an agreed upon topic but without pre-planned questions or direction, and the structured interview, where the participants are asked to respond to a set of pre-arranged questions and do not venture outside those parameters. The advantage to the semi-structured interview is that it allows the researcher to introduce questions and issues that they may consider relevant and important to the study while still making available the space and flexibility for participants to lead the conversation and define the direction they would like to go while sharing their lived experiences. A list of potential interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

- 6c. How will these procedures and methods be described to participants in the process of obtaining informed consent?

Participants will be given a list of potential interview questions (in Appendix A) prior to interviewing. Any questions or concerns they may have regarding these questions can be addressed either before or during the interview. This will be outlined in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet available to potential participants as well as in the Participant Consent Form for actual participants.

- * 6d. How much time will be required to participate?

Two 1.5-hour individual interviews and an individual review of findings (1-1.5 hours with each participant at the conclusion of the study).

- * 6e. Where will participation happen?

Participation will take place in a professional office on loan to the researcher.

- 6f. What special training or qualifications are required for data gatherers?

I will be the only person collecting data for this study. I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Psychology, having completed all required course work and candidacy exams. My qualifications also include (1) completion of a supervised 1600-hour clinical internship, and (2) six years of work experience as a clinical therapist for a BC government ministry.

I. Potential Risks and Benefits

- 7. What are the potential or known inconveniences associated with participation and how will these be described in the consent process?

The main inconvenience is that the researcher has only one location available for interviews and that the participants must find their way to the interview site. This will be described in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet available to potential participants and the Participant Consent Form for actual participants.

- * 8a. Are there any of the following potential risks to participants?

physical social psychological emotional economic
Other (specify)

- 8b. Provide details to your answer below and describe how you will explain the risks to participants.

Before the interview begins, the researcher will explain to the participant the possibility that the subject matter being discussed during the interview may engender upsetting thoughts and memories. I will be available during and after the interview to debrief with participants any such issues. If necessary, referrals to qualified therapists will be made. If at any point the participant wishes to withdraw from the study, no questions will be asked and their interview information will be destroyed. This will be described in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet available to potential participants and the Participant Consent Form for actual participants.

- 9. If there are any anticipated risks, how will they be minimized and dealt with if they occur (e.g., provide referrals to counseling services)? How you will describe this minimization to participants.

As stated above, I will be available for debriefing during and after the interview. I will also be contacting participants after the interview session to discuss any concerns that may have arisen since the interview. Before the interviews even begin, I will have a list of names and telephone numbers of therapists who have dealt with similar client issues. If need be, I will personally contact a therapist to arrange for a session. Finally, participants will have the name and telephone number of my Supervisor should they have any questions or concerns about the research process, its intent or myself. This information will be described in the Participant Consent Form available to all potential participants and the Participant Consent Form for actual participants.

- * 10a. Are there any potential or known benefits associated with participation?

X directly to the participant X to society X to state of knowledge

- 10b. How will you describe these benefits to the participant?

The researcher will explain to participants that very little research has been conducted on the topic affecting them—fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children—and that by conducting such research it may provide additional resources for those interested in affecting social policy change regarding divorced/separated fathers' parental rights.

- 10c. If there are any inducements (e.g., gifts, compensation, grades, bonus points) to participate, what are they and why are they necessary?

N/A

J. Consent

- 11a. Informed consent requires that participation be voluntary and that the participants have the right to withdraw at anytime without consequences. How will you explain these options to potential participants?

The Invitation To Participate pamphlet will clearly state that participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any time without question. This will be reemphasized in the Participant Consent Form as well at the beginning of each interview with participants and prior to the final data analysis.

- 11b. What happens to a person's data if he/she withdraws part way through the study?

it will not be used in the analysis

it is logistically impossible to remove individual participant data

it will be used in the analysis if the participant agrees to this (specify how this agreement will be obtained)

- 11c. How will you explain this to the participants?

It will be made clear in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet and the Participant Consent Form that should they withdraw from the study their information will not be used in the final analysis. It will also be restated at the beginning of each interview with participants.

- 12a. Are you in any way in a position of authority or power over participants?

Examples of a "power over" dilemma include teachers/students, therapists/clients, and supervisors/employees.

No

Yes (If "yes", explain your relationship and how coercion will be prevented.)

- * 12b. Provide a description of how this will be discussed in the consent process.

- * 13. How will you provide for ongoing consent by participants during the data gathering period? How will this be described to participants?

This is primarily an issue in research that occurs over multiple occasions or an extended period of time.

At the end of each interview, participants will be asked if they wish to continue with the study. Prior to the final data analysis, participants will again be contacted and asked if they wish to have their data included in the final analysis.

- * 14. Do you anticipate that this research will be used for a commercial purpose?

No

Yes (If "yes", explain how you will describe this to the participants in the consent process.)

K. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Questions 15 and 16 deal with anonymity and confidentiality. While these two concepts are related, they are NOT the same. Please refer to the Guidelines and the brief definitions below to assist you in answering these questions.

Anonymity refers to the protection of the identity of participants. Anonymity can be provided along a continuum, from "complete" to "no" protection. Complete protection means that no identifying information will be collected.

- 15a. Will the anonymity of participants be protected?
X Yes (completely) Yes (partially) No
- 15b. If "yes", how will anonymity be protected and how will this be explained in the consent process?

The researcher will transcribe the interview tapes and during this process the participant's name will be replaced with an alternative (code) name. The names of their children, their children's mother, and any other individuals mentioned in the interview will also be replaced with alternative (code) names. Any other possible identifying information will be either removed or changed. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to the raw data (interview tapes) that will contain the actual names of the participants. The results of the study, both published and unpublished, will in no way contain the names of the participants, their children, or their children's mother. This will be outlined in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet made available potential participants as well as in the Participant Consent Form for actual participants.

- 15c. If "no", justify why loss of anonymity is required and explain how this will be explained in the consent process.

Confidentiality refers to the protection, access, control and security of the data and personal information.

- 16a. Will you provide confidentiality to the participants and their data?
X Yes No
- 16b. If "yes", how will confidentiality be protected and how will this be explained in the consent process?

Informants' rights of confidentiality will be ensured by assigning code names to each participant which will be used to label audiotapes and transcripts of interviews. The raw data with the actual participant names will be kept in a separate file in a separate secure file cabinet. Upon completion of the study, all identifying information including consent forms for participation will be destroyed. This will be outlined in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet provided to potential participants and the Participant Consent Form

for actual participants.

*16c. If "no", justify the lack of confidentiality and explain how this will be explained in the consent process.

L. Results and Uses of Data

• 17. What other uses will be made of the data? How will this be described to participants?

I will be using the data for writing professional articles and presenting at scholarly meetings and conferences after completing the dissertation. Participants will be informed of this intention in the Participant Consent Form. This will also be stated in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet available to potential participants.

• 18. When the research is complete what are your plans for preserving and protecting data or for destroying data?
How will these plans be described to participants?

All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study by shredding and burning paper materials and incinerating non-paper materials such as audiotapes. Computer discs will be destroyed in a similar manner and the computer hard drive will be cleared of any related material. This will be outlined in both the Invitation To Participate pamphlet and the Participant Consent Form.

* 19a. How do you anticipate disseminating your results?

X Directly to participants X Published article
X Thesis/Dissertation/class presentation Internet
X Presentations at scholarly meetings Other (specify below)

* 19b. How will you describe the dissemination of results to participants during the consent process?

I will explain to participants, both in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet provided to potential participants and the Participant Consent Form for actual participants that the information being gathered will be used for a doctoral dissertation and may be used for presentations at scholarly meetings or for published articles.

M. Contact Information

- 20. How will participants be able to contact you (and/or your supervisor) if they have questions or concerns about the study?

Provide telephone numbers that participants may use for the principal investigator, and (if applicable) the student's supervisor, and other researchers. The consent form must include the telephone number of the Associate Vice-President, Research (250-472-4362).

Participants will be given my name and telephone number as well as my supervisor's name and telephone number. The telephone number of the Associate Vice-President Research will also be given. These will be listed in the Invitation To Participate pamphlet provided to potential participants and in the Participant Consent Form for actual participants.

- 21a. Other than the investigators, what are the names of individuals (employees or volunteers) who will be involved in data gathering or management? *If not known at the time of submission, provide this information to us when it becomes available.*

- 1 **Dr. Geoffrey Hett (Supervisor)**
- 2 **Dr. Tim Black (Committee Member)**
- 3 **Dr. Honore France (Committee Member)**
- 4
- 5

- 21b. If these individuals require special training, skills, and/or qualifications, what are they and how will they be adequately prepared?

None is required.

N. Special questions related to additional review criteria

22. Does this study involve any form of deception?

No Yes (If "yes", complete the attached *Request to Use Deception Form*)

- 23a. Does this project involve collection of data at multiple sites within Canada? No Yes

- 23b. If "yes", are your collaborators required to obtain ethical approval for this project at other sites?

No Yes (If "yes", provide research ethics board certificate of approval)

- 24a. Will this study be conducted in a country other than Canada? No
 Yes

24b. If "yes", provide details below of how this research conforms to the laws, customs and regulations of the host country.

25. If there is anything else you believe the Committee should know about this study, provide that information below.

None.

26. If applicable, attach the following documents to this application. Check those that are appended.

Consent forms (use the attached *Participant Consent Form Template*)

Recruitment materials (for individuals, organizations, etc.)

Interview schedules

Questionnaires

Deception Form (use the attached *Request to Use Deception Form*)

Human Tissues Form

Permission to gain access to confidential documents or materials

Approval from external organizations where required (or proof of having made a request for permission)

APPENDIX B: Human Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval



University
of Victoria

Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
University of Victoria
Room A240 University Centre
Tel (250) 472-4545 Fax (250) 721-8960
Email ovrhe@uvic.ca Web www.research.uvic.ca

Human Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Zane Kirby Shannon Graduate Student	<u>Department/School</u> EPLS	<u>Supervisor</u> Dr. Geoffrey Hett	
<u>Co-Investigator(s)</u> :			
<u>Project Title</u> : Becoming Childless: A Hermeneutical Exploration of the Voices of Fathers Who Have Lost Contact With Their Children			
<u>Protocol No.</u> 370-04	<u>Approval Date</u> 18-Oct-04	<u>Start Date</u> 18-Oct-04	<u>End Date</u> 17-Oct-05

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.

Dr. Richard Keeler
Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions or minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of a "Research Status" form.

370-04 Shannon, Zane Kirby

APPENDIX C: Invitation to Participate Form

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A DISSERTATION STUDY ON FATHERS WHO HAVE UNWILLINGLY LOST CONTACT WITH THEIR CHILDREN

My name is Zane Shannon. I am a Doctoral student at the University of Victoria, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies. I am currently undertaking research for my dissertation on the topic of **fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children after divorce or relationship breakdown**. This recruitment letter has been sent to you by the Victoria Men's Centre on my behalf. No personal contact information has been given to me regarding those receiving this pamphlet.

The structure of the Canadian family is undergoing dramatic changes. The traditional nuclear family now occupies a position alongside a variety of household arrangements. Indeed, recent data indicates that over half of all families in Canada today are non-traditional in structure. One of the most influential reasons for this is the increased incidence of divorce and separation. Estimates vary, but it is generally predicted that **four out of ten marriages in Canada will end in divorce**.

This social trend has generated both research and clinical concerns over the consequences of divorce. A large body of research exists regarding how divorce is distressful for children. Likewise, there is significant research on how divorce impacts mothers. However, **much less attention has been given to the impact of divorce on fathers**. In particular, **research is almost absent on, perhaps, the most distressing issue facing divorced fathers: losing contact with their children**.

This study will attempt to address this research vacuum and **provide an opportunity for these fathers to be heard**. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children. It is envisioned that the sharing of these fathers' experiences will sensitize and inform legal, therapeutic, and research communities as well as the general public about the importance of fatherhood to fathers who are divorced.

PARTICULARS OF THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the research is to explore and give voice to fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children due to separation

or divorce. The primary objectives are, (1) to provide a scholarly study that advances knowledge in an area where a research vacuum currently exists, and (2) sensitize and inform legal, therapeutic, and research communities as well as the general public about the importance of fatherhood to fathers who are divorced.

Importance of the Study: This research is important because it breaks ground in an area of parent/child relations that has, to date, received little, if any, scholarly attention despite the significant number of fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children after a relationship breakdown.

Social Benefits of the Study: As stated in the opening paragraphs of this package, very little research has been conducted on the topic of fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children. By conducting such research, an additional resource will be available for those interested in affecting social policy change.

Participant Selection: Participants will be selected through the Victoria Men's Centre. I will be asking for volunteers who meet the following main requirements, (1) that they have lost contact with their children after a separation or divorce, (2) that the loss of contact was not of their choosing, and (3) that prior to losing contact they considered themselves to be emotionally invested in their children's lives.

Data Collection: I will be using a semi-structured interview technique. This approach allows me to introduce questions that I may consider relevant and important to the study while still making available the space and flexibility for participants to lead the conversation and define the direction they would like to go. A list of potential interview questions has been attached to the back of this information package and is labelled as "Appendix A." The interviews will consist of two 1.5-hour individual interviews and an individual review of findings (1-1.5 hours) with each participant at the conclusion of the study.

Location of Interviews: Participation will take place in a professional office on loan to the researcher. The main inconvenience to any potential participant is that the researcher has only one location available for interviews and they will have to find their way to the site. The address: *xxxx Victoria, B.C.*

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Freedom to Withdraw from Study: At any time during the course of this study, participants will be free to withdraw from the study without question and

without the need for explanation. Should a participant withdraw from the study, their information will be destroyed and not used in the final analysis.

Anonymity of Participants: After the interview sessions are complete, I will be transcribing the interview tapes and, during this process, replacing the participant's names with alternative names. The names of their children and children's mothers, and any other individuals mentioned in the interviews, will also be replaced with alternative (code) names. Any other possible identifying information on these tapes will be either removed or changed. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to the raw data (interview tapes) that will contain the actual names of participants. The results of the study, both published and unpublished, will in no way contain the names of the participants, their children, or their children's mothers.

Confidentiality of Participants: Informants' rights of confidentiality will be ensured by assigning code names to each participant which will then be used to label audiotapes and transcripts of interviews. The raw data with the actual participant names will be kept in a separate file in a separate secured file cabinet. Upon completion of the study, all identifying information, including consent forms for participation, will be destroyed.

Destruction of Data: All data will be destroyed upon completion of the study by shredding and burning paper materials and incinerating non-paper materials such as audiotapes. Computer discs will be destroyed in a similar manner and the computer hard drive will be cleared of any related material.

Potential Risks of Research to Participants: For the most part, participants experience interviews as positive experiences. Being able to give voice to one's lived experience, especially if it has had a profound effect upon one's life, can be rewarding. The highly personal nature of such interviews, however, can also engender upsetting thoughts and feelings as the interviewee reflects upon aspects of their lived experience.

Minimizing and Dealing with Potential Risks: To address the above, following each interview I will be available to debrief and provide support as necessary. I will also be contacting participants after the interview sessions to discuss any concerns that may have arisen since the interview. Participants will also be encouraged to contact me directly should they feel they wish to discuss any issues arising from the interviews. If further assistance is required, I will have a list of names and telephone numbers of therapists who have dealt with similar client issues and, if need be, I will personally contact a therapist to arrange for a meeting. Finally, participants will have the name and telephone

number of my Supervisor should they have any questions or concerns about the research process, its intent or myself. The Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria can also be contacted at the number below.

Other Potential Uses of Data and Dissemination of Results: In addition to using the information collected for my dissertation, I may use the collected data for writing professional articles and presenting at scholarly meetings and conferences. As previously stated, all identifying information will be removed or changed.

Contact Information: Interested potential participants are asked to contact me, the researcher, either by telephone or email, at which time I would be happy to discuss in greater detail the purpose of the study, the appropriateness of their inclusion in the study and any other questions you may have.

Zane K. Shannon (Researcher)

Telephone: (250) xxx-xxxx

Email: zshannon@uvic.ca

Dr. Geoffrey Hett (Supervisor)

University of Victoria

Telephone: (250) 721-7783

Associate Vice-President, Research

University of Victoria

Telephone: (250) 472-4362

APPENDIX D: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Becoming Childless: A Hermeneutical Exploration of the Voices of Fathers Who Have Lost Contact With Their Children

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled, Becoming Childless: A Hermeneutical Exploration of the Voices of Fathers Who Have Lost Contact With Their Children, that is being conducted by myself, Zane K. Shannon, Ph.D. (Candidate). I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria. You may contact me if you have further questions by calling me at (250) xxx-xxxx or emailing me at zshannon@uvic.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Geoffrey Hett, at (250) 721-7783 or at his email hettg@uvic.ca. Finally, you may also contact the Associate Vice-President Research at (250) 472-4362.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Educational Psychology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Geoffrey Hett. You may contact my supervisor at the above telephone number or email address.

The purpose of this research project is to explore and give voice to fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children due to separation or divorce. The primary objectives are, (1) to provide a scholarly study that advances knowledge in an area where a research vacuum currently exists, and (2) sensitize and inform legal, therapeutic, and research communities as well as the general public about the importance of fatherhood to fathers who are divorced.

Research of this type is important because it breaks ground in an area of parent/child relations that has, to date, received little, if any, scholarly attention despite the significant number of fathers who have unwillingly lost contact with their children after a relationship breakdown.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you meet the main requirements for this study. I am seeking volunteers who meet the following requirements, (1) that they have lost contact with their children after a separation or divorce, (2) that the loss of contact was not of their choosing, and (3) that prior to losing contact they considered themselves to be emotionally invested in their child's life.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include two 1.5-hour individual interviews and an individual review of findings

of approximately 1-1.5 hours at the conclusion of the study. I will be using a semi-structured interview technique. This approach allows me to introduce questions that I may consider relevant and important to the study while still making available the space and flexibility for you to lead the conversation and define the direction you would like to go. A list of potential interview questions is provided in Appendix A. During the interview process, it will be necessary for me to audiotape our sessions so that I can analyze the information collected and draw my final conclusions for the study (please see below for information on issues of privacy and tape destruction). By way of consent, please provide your initials in the space provided so that I have your permission to audiotape our interview sessions. _____ (Participant's initials.)

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including finding your way to the interview location, as it is the only professional space available for me to conduct these interviews.

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research. They include that the subject matter being discussed during the interview may engender upsetting thoughts and memories. To deal with these risks the following steps will be taken: (1) you do not have to answer/discuss any of the questions asked by myself during the interviews, and you may stop at any time during the interview if you feel upset, (2) I will be available during and after the interview to debrief and provide support as necessary, (3) I will also be contacting you after the interview sessions to discuss any concerns that may have arisen since the interview, (4) you will also be encouraged to contact me directly should you feel that you wish to discuss any issues arising from the interviews, (5) if further assistance is required, I will have a list of names and telephone numbers of therapists who have dealt with similar client issues and, finally, (6) you will have the name and telephone number of my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about the research process, its intent or myself.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include furthering knowledge in an area where very little research has been conducted. Such research may also provide additional resources to those interested in affecting social policy change.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed and not used in the final analysis.

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will enquire at the end of each interview as to whether or not you wish to continue as a participant in the study. Prior to the final data analysis, you will be contacted and asked if you wish to have your data included in the final analysis.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, I alone will transcribe the interview tapes. During this process, your name will be replaced with an alternative (code) name. The names of your children, their children's mother, and any other individuals mentioned in the interview will also be replaced with alternative (code) names. Any other possible identifying information will be either removed or changed. Only my supervisor and myself will have access to the raw data (interview tapes) that will contain actual names. The results of the study, both published and unpublished, will in no way contain your name, your children's names, or your children's mother's name.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by assigning you a code name which will be used to label audiotapes and transcripts of interviews. The raw data with your actual name will be kept in a separate file in a separate secured file cabinet. Upon completion of the study, all identifying information including consent forms for participation will be destroyed.

Other planned uses of this data include the possibility of writing professional articles and presenting at scholarly meetings and conferences.

Data from this study will be disposed of by shredding and burning paper materials and incinerating non-paper materials, such as audiotapes. Computer discs will be destroyed in a similar manner and the computer hard drive will be cleared of any related material.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be made available to both the public and academic communities through my doctoral dissertation and possibly through presentations at scholarly meetings and published articles.

In addition to being able to contact me and my supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

APPENDIX E: Potential Interview Questions

Potential Interview Questions

1. Share with me what your expectations were of being a father before your child(ren) was/were born. What did it mean to you once they were born?
2. How did your perception of being a father change for you as your child(ren) grew older?
3. How was your relationship with your child(ren) just prior to telling them that you and their mother were going to separate/divorce?
4. What happened during this time?
5. What were your concerns as a father during this time?
6. When did you first have a sense that your relationship with your children was changing? What was that like for you?
7. Was there a discussion with your partner/wife at that time about how your child(ren) would be parented after the separation/divorce?
8. Were these agreements honoured?
9. If so, when did you notice that things began to change in terms of this agreement? What was that like for you?
10. Did you notice any change in your child(ren)'s behaviour towards you during this time? What was that like for you?
11. When did you begin experiencing real problems accessing your children? What was that like for you?
12. What steps did you take when you began to experience problems with access?
13. Were there family members, friends, others who were supporting you in your efforts? Were there such individuals supporting your children's mother's actions?
14. What were these efforts like for you?

15. Did you feel supported and understood in these efforts?
16. What does being a father mean to you now?
17. At what point did you think you were going to lose contact with your child(ren)? What was that like for you?
18. How long has it been since you last saw your child(ren)? How has that been for you?
19. Do you hold out hope that you will see them again one day?
20. Do you discuss your situation with others? At work, during leisure activities, etc.?
21. If so, generally, what is the response from others?
22. If not, why stops you from doing so?
23. If you could go back in time, knowing what you know now, would you want to become a father?
24. If it were up to you to change current policies regarding custody and access issues, what changes would you make?
25. If you were given an opportunity to address the world, what would you want to say about your experience?

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FOOTNOTES

¹Statistics Canada includes three main components in its definition of a family—married couples (with or without children), common-law couples including same-sex couples (with or without children), and single parents.

²The traditional family has traditionally been defined as a legally married couple (male & female) with one or more of their joint offspring all living in the same residence.

³41% of all families are married couples with children. If one looks only at families with children at home (married, common-law, and single parent) this group represents 65% of all such families. However, 12% of married and common-law couples with children are step-families. When this is adjusted for, married couples with their offspring represent 57% of families with children. Likewise, common-law couples with their offspring represent 9% of families with children, single parents represent 25% of families with children, and step-families represent 9% of all families with children (Statistics Canada, 2001).

⁴While divorce does play a significant role in the changing landscape of families in Canada, other factors include fewer marriages, increases in remarriage, increases in cohabitation, decreases in fertility rates, an aging population, and acknowledgement of same-sex unions.

⁵ Statistics Canada defines the divorce rate as the proportion of marriages that will end in divorce within 30 years.

⁶Unfortunately there is no data on the number of common-law unions with or without children that end. Common-law relationships have increased from 5.6% of total families in 1981 to 14% in 2001. One can surmise that the “divorce” rate for common-law unions with or without children is roughly the same as legally married unions with or without children.

⁷In this meta-analysis, Amato and Keith reviewed 180 published studies on this topic; 92 were chosen for analysis that involved 13,000 children. In general, their study concluded that children from divorced families experience lower levels of well-being across a variety of psychological and social domains than do children from nondivorced families. As Amato (1993) states: “The cumulative picture that emerges from the evidence suggests that parental divorce (or some factor connected with it) is associated with lowered well-being among...children...of divorce” (p. 23). While there are a number of

methodological issues with this aggregated study and divorce studies in general (Demo, 1993), most researchers agree that the changes associated with divorce are distressful for children.

⁸In this meta-analysis, Amato and Keith chose 37 studies that involved 81,678 individuals. In general, this study concluded that the effects of divorce were enduring. As Amato notes: "The meta-analysis suggests that even as adults, children of divorce exhibit slightly lower well-being than do people from continuously intact families of origin." (p. 35). Again, it should be noted there are a number of methodological issues with this aggregated study as well (Demo, 1993). Whether or not the effects of divorce are as enduring as the above study suggests is still open to debate.

⁹Replicating Amato and Keith's 1991a meta-analysis research design, the authors conducted a meta-analysis of children's adjustment to parental divorce based upon 35 research articles published since the completion of the Amato and Keith study. As noted by the authors, the adjustment outcomes (school achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, social adjustment, mother-child relations, father-child relations) were more or less the same as in the Amato and Keith study.

¹⁰Much has been written about divorced mothers, how they fare both emotionally, socially and economically after divorce, and their relationships with their children. Mothers tend to receive primary parenting responsibilities and physical custody of the children far more often than fathers. As a result, much of the research has focused upon mothers and their parenting, adjustment, and lifestyle changes.

¹¹Just how many fathers lose contact with their children altogether is unknown, but it is suggestive that their numbers may be significant (Nielsen, 1999). One factor for this is the law that gives most mothers the legal right to move whenever and wherever they want. While Canadian figures are not available, in the US 40% of fathers do not live in the same state as their children (Bender & Brandon, 1994). While some of these fathers move for job-related reasons, most fathers endeavor to be geographically close to their children (Nielsen, 1999). Research strongly suggests, though, that the most important factor determining a father's involvement with their child(ren) after divorce is dependent upon how their ex-wife feels about him and what she will allow, not how involved he was with the children prior to divorce (Amato & Booth, 1997; Hetherington, 1999).

¹²In a similar vein, Anne McLelland (who served as Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada from 1997 to 2002, Minister of Health from 2002 to 2003 and Deputy Prime Minister from 2003 to 2006) wrote, "joint custody may simply perpetuate the influence and domination of men over the lives of women" (Maiello, J. & Jebbett, M., 1998).

¹³A large number of fathers do not even fight for joint custody because they believe it is unlikely they will be granted equal rights as parents. To save themselves the emotional, let alone financial, costs many do not pursue joint custody in their divorce settlement (Fathers 4 Justice, 2004; Victoria Men's Centre; confidential personal communication, January, 2004).

¹⁴ Indeed, Kruk (1993) reported that 90% of fathers claim some denial of access to their children.

¹⁵In 2000/2001 British Columbia Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) collected 70% of all support payments (Fathers for Justice – Canada, 2004). This might support the idea that fathers must be compelled to make child support payments. However, it takes little more than saying you did not receive a support payment to have FMEP become involved. Once registered, all future payments must be made through FMEP until the court order deems the child "of age."

¹⁶Indeed, in Canada fathers are legally compelled to provide for their children well beyond the age of consent. If a child is attending post-secondary education the father must continue to pay child support if the child is living at home and may be compelled to pay for those educational costs. In the case of a university degree payment is enforced until the degree is completed within a "reasonable" time. In some cases, this reasonable time sees the child in their late-twenties. Non-divorced parents are not legally compelled to provide for their children—education or otherwise—beyond the age of consent.

¹⁷Many fathers are reluctant to seek help because they are concerned that information—that they are seeing a therapist—could be used against them in any future custody and access disputes (Fathers 4 Justice, 2004; confidential personal communication, March, 2004). They are also told, indirectly, that they don't matter by the therapeutic community. School counsellors and mental health therapists working with children tend to exclude the divorced father, acting as if

the child has only one parent, the mother (confidential personal communication, March, 2004).

¹⁸Interestingly, these missing voices are beginning to find a forum for expression on the World Wide Web. Because there is very little, if any, research on the custody and access issues faced by men, much of the information available is found not in academic journals but on internet web sites. One of the goals of this paper is to assist in bringing these issues out of the shadows of the Internet and into traditional academic circles where it can help "legitimize" their issues.

¹⁹ These results are similar to what the American Bar Association's 1991 study found: 80% of divorced parents engage in such behaviours with 20% engaging in it daily.

²⁰The term "target" will be used to refer to the parent who is the object of alienation. Usually, but not exclusively, this is the non-custodial parent as well as the being the father. The term "programming" will be used to refer to the parent who manipulates the child to denigrate the target parent. Usually, but not exclusively, this is the custodial parent as well as being the mother.

²¹The scientific study of human behaviour is relatively new. Prior to the nineteenth century, explanations of human behaviour were mainly sought from the Bible, the church, and from philosophers. The movement toward the scientific study of human behaviour was prompted by the various writings of: Francis Bacon, who argued for an inductive-experimental method to replace Aristotlian deductive-logic methodology; Galileo, who argued that nature was consistent and it was possible to describe it using mathematical formulas; Thomas Hobbes, who believed that humans could be studied using procedures borrowed from the natural sciences; Ernst Mach, who argued that the study of humans should be built upon descriptions of experience, not interpretations; Auguste Comte, who argued that absolute laws of human behaviour could be established and used to engineer an ideal society; and John Stuart Mill, who provided a philosophical and logical argument for the use of natural science methods in the study of human behaviour. These descriptions of their roles in the development of positivism are very basic and the reader is directed to Polkinghorne (1983) for a more detailed overview of these and other contributors.

²²A thorough accounting of these criticisms is beyond the scope of this paper. For a very detailed review of the problems associated with positivism the reader is directed to Polkinghorne (1983).

²³Sociology and, in particular, Anthropology are no strangers to qualitative methods. Fieldwork is largely a qualitative methodology and has enjoyed legitimacy for quite some time within these disciplines, especially in the form of early anthropological participant observation methods.

²⁴These are by no means the only writers who have contributed to the development of hermeneutics. Other important influences have been Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Paul Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor. I have chosen to review Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer, though, because (a) no ground-breaking innovations in hermeneutics have appeared since Gadamer's, (b) Gadamer's philosophical work is heavily indebted to Heidegger, and (c) Heidegger's work developed from his critique of Husserl (Grondin, 1994).

²⁵The term phenomenology is so widely used in a variety of ways that its meaning is confusing. Sometimes it is viewed as a paradigm, synonymous with qualitative methods. Other times it is viewed as a perspective or philosophy, synonymous with "seeing the world through the eyes of the beholder." Lately it is used in conjunction with hermeneutics—"hermeneutic phenomenology"—as a theoretical perspective. However, little thought is given to whether the two terms are actually compatible with one another. It is beyond the purpose of this study to sort out these issues. Nonetheless, it is once again important to note that researchers must carefully explicate the assumptions underlying their theoretical perspective and are aware of any inconsistencies that would call into question their methodology.

²⁶Some followers of phenomenology may argue that my interpretation of this orientation is a rather simplistic one. Indeed, it is in order to stress the difference between description and interpretation, a realist versus a relativistic ontology. If one believes in a pure or singular form of phenomena, then this is realist ontology. There is no room for interpretation, just description as interpretation implies other possible views. If one believes in multiple views of phenomena then this is a relativistic ontology and, hence, an interpretation of one such reality.

²⁷This approach appeals to me as a therapist as well. Although the practice of psychotherapy purports a neutral stance, that is, one where the therapist does not tell the client what they should or should not do and allows the client to make decisions, my professional experience has been that all too often therapists take an expert role. Part of the reason for this is, I believe, is that many therapists' own ontological and epistemological beliefs are not fully articulated and, thus, their practice may not be congruent with their fundamental assumptions of knowledge and the client-therapist relationship

²⁸More will be discussed about this concept in the section "Data Analysis."

²⁹One of the basic tenets of Existentialism maintains that there is no inherent meaning in life and that it is the individual that creates such meaning (Yalom, 1981). As Jean-Paul Sartre declared, "existence precedes essence."

³⁰As an example of two groups competing for limited resources: Although most fathers' groups simply want the equitable treatment of fathers in their post-divorce situation, the recent increase attention to fathers' rights has generated concern among women's and mothers' rights groups that increased services for fathers will be at the expense of services for single mothers, not that children would benefit from an equal involvement of both parents. Mothers' gains (custody and child support) have traditionally been fathers' losses. Are fathers' gains now to become mothers' losses?

³¹"The Tragedy of the Commons," by sociologist Garrett Hardin, was originally published in Science Magazine in 1968 and has been used for many years as an illustration of why the concept of communal, willing cooperation amongst groups of people is not possible.

Within this scenario, the modern socio-political system is represented as a rural pasture, open to all within the community. With a carrying capacity of ten animals, ten shepherds each graze a single animal upon it, thereby maxing out the pasture's available grass. Acting on his natural human instincts, one of the shepherds realizes that a profit can be made by adding one more of his own sheep to the pasture. The addition of this extra sheep means less food for each of the original animals. Since, however, this shepherd only owns one-tenth of the herd, he only has to pay one-tenth of the support costs and, by exploiting the commons and his fellow shepherds, creates a profit for himself at the expense of the common good. As grass runs out and the other sheep do not fatten properly, the other shepherds lose profit and must add more of their own sheep to try and make up their loss. This produces mutual exploitation of the commons until

overgrazing ultimately destroys the common pasture, and all the shepherds lose their herds.

Hardin used this model as a representation of modern human society and argued that people, left to their own devices, will act in their own best interests and not in the interest of the common good. He further argued that without systems of law in place, the rights of individuals or smaller groups within a larger socio-political system would likely be exploited or subverted for the benefit of others.

Human Evolutionary Ecology, a field within Anthropology (Cronk, Chagnon & Irons, 2000), uses this model as an example of the true "nature" of human beings as members of the animal kingdom. That "nature" being self-preservation and personal gain for one's self and one's immediate social group at the expense of others, if necessary.

³²Originally a Marxist think-tank funded by the wealthy son of a German millionaire, the Frankfurt School, Frankfurt, Germany, helped create an innovative brand of philosophically oriented radical social science known as Critical Theory. Associated with Frankfurt University in the 1920s and early 1930s and again in the 1950s through the 1960s (with a Nazi era exile in Geneva and at Columbia University and a post-war stay in California), the Frankfurt School thinkers produced an innovative blend of radical philosophy and social science and brought continental philosophy and German intellectual traditions across the Atlantic to America. Critical theory helped shape scholarship and theorizing in contemporary sociology, literary, film, and cultural studies, as well as having a brief but significant influence on the intellectuals associated with the social movement of the New Left. Today it is most commonly associated with Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas.

³³Purposive sampling is often employed in qualitative research. At the heart of qualitative research, especially a hermeneutical orientation, is the quest to understand the lived experience of individuals. Purposive sampling helps researchers do so by selecting "information rich" that can provide the greatest insight into the research question.

³⁴I am certainly aware that the term "measure" is somewhat antithetical to qualitative research. Perhaps another way of stating this question would be: are you accurately conveying to the reader what the informant was saying?

³⁵ I have been surprised at how many dissertations and, indeed, published research articles I have come across that are guilty of mixing incompatible ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. For example, studies that purport to be Hermeneutical arguing for and utilizing bracketing and stating that they are descriptive rather than interpretative. Invariably, I find myself questioning the “validity” of the study.

³⁶ Perhaps one of the earliest known examples within Social Science of personalized journal keeping during research is that of Bronislaw Malinowski, the Anthropologist who, in the 1940's, spent several years doing Participant Observation in the Trobriand Islands. His journals contain many examples of personal observations on not only the activities he was witnessing and participating in, but also on his own personal feelings and biases about what he was seeing. While it is doubtful that it was actually Malinowski's intention that these journals be used to assess how his biases and beliefs may have ultimately affected his research, he has, nonetheless, provided an important example of yet another technique that the larger academic community can access to gauge the validity of a study.