

STORIES THAT TAKE CARE OF US

A Study of Adolescents Cast as a Difficulty in Family

by

Susanne Catherine Gregory
B. Ed. University of British Columbia, 1969

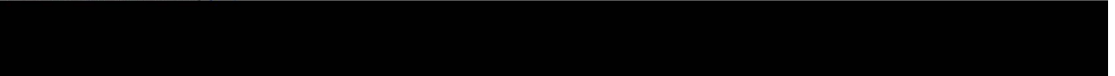
A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of


MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Psychological Foundations in Education
We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard


Dr. Geoffrey G. Hett, Supervisor (Department of Psychological Foundations)


Dr. C. Brian Harvey, Departmental Member (Department of Psychological Foundations)


Dr. Antoinette Oberg, Outside Member (Department of Communications and Social Foundations)


Dr. Michael J. Prince, External Examiner (Faculty of Human and Social Development)

© Susanne Catherine Gregory, 1998
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopying or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisor: Dr. Geoffrey G. Hett


Abstract


This inquiry illuminates the experience of adolescents who are cast as a difficulty in their family. Much has been written about the trouble acting-out youths cause in families and many programs have been developed to help the parents of these youths. There is, however, scant information about the thoughts and feelings of adolescents who are the focus of their families' concern.


The research method involved interviewing five adolescents. The researcher's experience is also included since she is part of the phenomenon being investigated. The findings are presented in the form of first person narratives followed by an interpretation based on Bowen family systems theory and on other ways of thinking about human behaviour.

The research reveals the struggles of adolescents as they attempt to make sense of their experience in family.

Examiners:


Dr. Geoffrey G. Hett, Supervisor (Department of Psychological Foundations)


Dr. C. Brian Harvey, Departmental Member (Department of Psychological Foundations)


Dr. Antoinette Oberg, Outside Member (Department of Communication and Social Foundations)



Dr. Michael J. Prince, External Examiner (Faculty of Human and Social Development)

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Dedication.....	viii
 CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Researcher's Context.....	1
The Research Question.....	2
A Bowen Family Systems View.....	3
Purpose and Significance of the Study.....	3
Locating the Ground.....	5
Bowen Family Systems Theory.....	8
 CHAPTER 2	
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
The Role of Anxiety.....	12
Family Systems View in Contrast to an Individual Perspective.....	14
Factors That Contribute to a Child-Focus.....	15
Triangles in a Child-Focused Family.....	17
 CHAPTER 3	
METHODOLOGY.....	20
Participants.....	21
Conducting the Interviews.....	22
Transcribing.....	23
Triangulation.....	24
A Search for Methodology.....	26
The Interview.....	27
Narrative.....	28
Metaphors.....	30
Participant-Researcher Relationship.....	30
Validity.....	36
Reflexivity.....	36
Congruence.....	37

Usefulness.....	37
Judgement of the Reader.....	38

CHAPTER 4

THE PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES AND AN INTERPRETATION.....	39
Joseph's Story - "Getting Heat".....	39
Blame.....	48
The Dialectic of Blame.....	50
Esther's Story - "Getting Your Back Up".....	58
Resistance.....	67
Noah's Story - "Feeling Like I Didn't Care.....	75
Hopelessness.....	85
Moses's Story - "Holding My Hand".....	90
Independence.....	98
Naomi's Story - "Walking on Egg Shells".....	106
Hyper-Vigilance.....	116
Triangles.....	119
Family Roles.....	122
a little pain in the butt.....	123
a blank.....	124
a bitch and a nursemaid.....	125
a drama queen.....	126
The Researcher's Story - "Speaking out".....	127
My Relationship to the Participants.....	132

CHAPTER 5

COMING TO THE END.....	141
Review.....	142
Limitations.....	143
Implications.....	144
A Personal Ending.....	147
References.....	150

Appendix A	
Letter of Informed Consent	161

Acknowledgements

Although without my own determination this work would never have been completed, there are many without whose help the writing of this thesis would have seemed an insurmountable task. They have not only assisted me with the nuts and bolts of writing a thesis; they have laughed with me. When one of the members of our thesis group was having difficulty, we would share her frustration and work towards a solution. In the end, a new way of thinking about the problem would emerge and we would drink our beer and laugh at the absurdity of thesis rules and regulations. It was the best of times! Thank you Elizabeth Chambers, Julie Garrison, Eugenie Lam and Maureen Murphy-Dyson.

And where would our thesis group be without that essential part of our meeting affectionally referred to as "Marie Said?" It was at this time that I shared the knowledge Marie Hoskins and I had generated through conversation during our weekly walk. When knowledge is socially constructed participants generally inform the conversation equally. In this case, Marie's contribution was far greater than mine.

During the first two years of graduate school my concern about the proper use of colons, semicolons and commas increased and reached its peak during the writing of my thesis. This was due solely to the willingness of my friend, Karen Chapple, to spend countless hours editing and debating the best use of a particular punctuation mark. Karen has made the art of punctuating a remarkably interesting subject.

To my walking partners and friends, Cheri Gulka, and Lynn Lawrence, who patiently listen to me discuss hermeneutics, phenomenology, and the

endless ins and outs of putting together a thesis, I offer my thanks. Undoubtedly, there were times when it must have seemed like a very long walk.

Thank you to my supervisor, Geoff Hett and to committee members Brian Harvey and Antoinette Oberg for supporting my inquiry. I appreciate Geoff's trust in my ability to do this work. When circumstances necessitated a change in a committee member, Antoinette graciously took me on as a student. Her suggestion that I "line up my question and my methodology" helped me fit the pieces of this inquiry together.

In the end it was my family who endured the worse of the rough patches while I was at graduate school. My shift in occupation from full time mother and homemaker to student meant significant changes for us all. My husband took over much of the shopping and cooking, while my children often had to wait for attention that at one time was always available. Because of my family's willingness to accept change and because of their encouragement, I have had the privilege of being a full time student.

Finally, I thank my participants without whom there would be no thesis. I was always moved by the thoughtfulness with which each of them answered my questions. As well as being the heart of this thesis, their stories have become part of my life. Milton Erickson said to his clients at the end of their counselling relationship that his voice would go with them. Over the past nine months I have often been surprised at the number of times the words of one of my participants have come to mind and reminded me of something I had forgotten.

Dedicated to

the family I was born into and to the family I helped create. Who I am, to a great extent, is because of you.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The intention of this study is twofold: (a) to illuminate the subjective experience of adolescents who are cast as a difficulty in family, and (b) to look at the functional aspects of this position from a Bowen family systems perspective. Systems therapists (Bowen, 1978; Guerin & Gordon, 1984; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Pillari, 1991) use a number of terms to describe the functional position of being viewed as the family difficulty. They include, focused-on child, symptomatic child, scapegoat, burden bearer, symptom bearer, and target child. A child-focus is in effect when "sufficient family anxiety is focused on one or more children to result in serious impairment in a child" (Bowen, 1978, p. 297).

The Researcher's Context

The concept of focusing on a child as a way for a family to manage anxiety was first introduced to me during an internship I did in Bowen family systems theory in 1993. Over the years, while raising my own children, I came in contact with many families who focused an inordinate amount of attention on one or more of their children. To some extent, I participated in this dynamic with one of my children. I have also witnessed the disruptive effect an intense child-focus creates in a family and the ongoing nature of the problem once the pattern is established. As a counsellor in an agency, I worked with a number of families who presented with a child as the problem. This past winter I co-facilitated a group for parents whose children were designated as severe behavioural difficulties and, as such, were the focus of the families' concern.

An unexpected discovery of this inquiry has been recalling the extent to which I had been focused on as a child and as an adolescent. As a responsible wife, mother, and graduate student, the fact that "I was always in trouble for something when I was growing up" seemed to have slipped my mind. I have found myself more intimately linked to the phenomenon than I intended. In my case, Krieger's (1991) statement appears to be a relatively good fit. "Any study of mine will be only loosely linked to the people it is about. It will be more tightly connected to me" (p. 153).

The Research Question

I began my inquiry with the question: What is the lived experience of being thought of as a difficulty in family? Over the past several years it has evolved into the following question: What is the adolescent's subjective experience of being thought of as a difficulty in family. How does this experience intersect with Bowen family systems theory, my own experience and the understanding of others?

The distinction between "being the difficulty in family" and "being thought of as the difficulty" is important. The phrase "thought of" points to the subjective nature of perception. By framing the question in this way my participants could agree that their families see them as difficult while at the same time refuse to accept this designation. One participant, echoing a sentiment expressed by all participants, said, "So it's almost like they're the problem - they're the difficulty and sometimes I think they are. . . . Yeah I'll put a lot on them."

A Bowen Family Systems View

In this view, problems are seen as residing within the family system rather than in the child. The child becomes the vehicle for expressing family anxiety. The systems view contrasts with the psychodynamic approach which sees problems as endogenous; that is, within the individual. (Bowen, 1978; Combrinck-Graham, 1989; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The more I thought and wrote about the experiences of my participants the more connections I began to see to my own story. In the original proposal I gave rather lofty reasons to substantiate the significance of my inquiry which included the ambitious attempt to respond to Marshall & Rossman's (1989) question: "What does the world need to know?" (p. 33). I do not intend to abandon this question altogether but to address it from a personal perspective, as well as from the understanding of others.

The narrative account of my experience is entitled "Speaking Out." "Having my say" held great significance for me in my family of origin and continues to be an important issue in my present life. It was not until I wrote my story that I made a connection between "speaking out" and my sensitivity to the silence of the focused-on child. In working with families who use child-focus as a way of managing anxiety, the intention of a family systems therapist is always to get the focus off the child as soon as possible and onto the marital dyad. Although I support this way of working, I was left to wonder what the child had to say. During my practicum when I worked with the parents of children who were viewed as severe behaviour problems, I was

curious about how these children would describe their experience in family. In both cases those who were spoken about had no voice.

In the last fifty years we have taken significant steps in recognizing the rights of those who have been oppressed, but I continue to see evidence of the silencing of children and adolescents that harkens back to a time when the injunction "children should be seen and not heard" was the norm. Considering the stereotypical image of adolescents who respond to parent's queries with one word answers, I was surprised at the willingness of my participants to talk about their experience. Several of the adolescents in my study were friends of my sons. When I explained the nature of my inquiry and asked if they knew anyone who might be interested in participating, both boys volunteered. I needed only one participant so the young person not included waited until one night when I was alone in the kitchen to tell me his story. He said, "Even though I'm not part of your research, it helps me to make sense of what's happening in my family when I talk to people like you."

In thinking about the eagerness with which these adolescents shared their stories, I was reminded of the healing potential of story telling discussed by Herman (1992) in her book *Trauma and Recovery*. Like those who have experienced trauma, my participants feel powerless to change the situation in which they find themselves. Storytelling offers them a place to regain some feeling of control over their lives. One of my participants, who sees himself caught in a losing battle with his mother said, "The advice I would give someone is to talk things through with anybody who would listen. It doesn't matter who they are, just someone that would listen and not judge you. Talking is a totally good way to get it out." His statement recognizes the

power inherent in telling one's story as "without voice, there is no possibility for resistance, for creativity or for change" (Gilligan, 1993, p. xix).

As the researcher, I took part in the creation of participants' stories by asking questions and acknowledging their difficulty. In the very act of "bearing witness" (Herman, 1992, p. 144) to another's story the experience loses much of the "specialness" that isolates the teller of the story from others. Parry (1991) confirms the consequential importance of listening. "The discovery of a person's own voice for the telling of her story occurs to the extent that she experiences her story being heard" (p. 44).

As well as offering an opportunity for the voices of adolescents to be heard, it is the intention of this inquiry to illuminate the larger issue of family dynamics. I concur with the following statement made by Bowen (1978) concerning his effort to advance knowledge about the family. "Whether or not this particular effort eventually proves reliable is of less importance than the fact that knowledge gained from study of the family is of critical importance to the total human phenomenon" (p. 282).

Locating the Ground

I have labored over my epistemological stance from the outset of my inquiry and tentatively submit the following position. I hold that humans and human families come into this world with what Bowen (1978) refers to as an emotional system which influences their behaviour. Mechanisms of the emotional system, which include responses that range from the most automatic instinctual ones to those that contain a mix of automatic and learned elements, are reflected in reciprocal functioning between family members (Bowen 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Corsini & Wedding, 1995). I also

acknowledge the constructivist notion "that the structure of the *perceiving* system determines the outcome of an interaction with outside systems" (Pare, 1995, p. 4). Contributing as well to my understanding of how humans come to know is the social constructionist perspective that knowledge is intersubjectively created. These three positions are described and summarized by Pare (1995). He contends that fundamental changes in the way we construe knowledge of the world has evolved and proposes that from

(1) a core belief in a knowable reality (Gergen, 1992), a "logical and ordered universe whose laws could be uncovered by science" (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 147), there has been a movement toward (2) a perspectivist position, which concludes that "all description tells us primarily about the person giving the description" (Golann, 1987, p. 332), and gradually to (3) a view that places the locus of knowledge in a *community* of persons with meaning construed as lying in between people rather than hidden away inside an individual (deShazer & Berg, 1992, p. 74). (as cited in Pare, 1995, p. 3)

While conceding that such a progression is underway, I am unwilling to entirely let go of a reality that exists apart from self construction or social construction. All three - a knowable reality, a perspectivist position and social construction - inform my research method. There is nothing particularly "tidy" about the evolution of these epistemology positions and many approaches to family therapy display features of these premises that include more than one of the stances delineated above (Pare, 1995). In coming to terms with these different world views I have engaged in a dialectic process with myself and with others and I relate to Kvale's (1996) statement that "In dialectical thought there is an emphasis upon the new, what is under

development" (p. 56). I own up to my discomfort in "straddling the borders" and accept the messiness of this position. In my academic circle, the notion of an "observed world as object" is not popular. None the less, I have found Bowen's theory a useful way to account for particular human behaviours. Unlike the modernist belief in truth, I do not maintain that my story is the one true story but another metaphor for viewing families. In putting forth my understanding of human behaviour I claim a postmodern openness to a diversity of perspective and contend with Haug (as cited in Kvale, 1996) that "If social processes are essentially contradictory, then empirical methods based on an exclusion of contradictions will be invalid for uncovering a contradictory social reality" (p. 57).

In an effort to integrate my epistemological positions, I found Daly's (1997) way of linking theory and subjective experience useful. Her idea "is to keep theory in play but to redefine theory in a way that keeps the theorist in play - all within the bounds of science" (p. 353). This means that subjective observations and experiences of the researcher are not treated as contaminants to be separated from the research. She argues in the interpretive tradition that theories are second-order stories.

Theoretical stories are a frame for interpretation and meaning making that allows the theorist to make sense of the stories of the research participants (first-order stories) and the theorist's own experience of living in, and being a part of, those stories. That is to say, theory, like any other form of narrative, is a structure that shapes meanings and determines effects. (p. 355)

The notion of a theory as a second-order story to which I bring my subjective observations makes sense to me. The combining of subjectivity and objectivity adds to the authenticity of the account of my participant's experience.

Bowen Family Systems Theory

In coming to terms with where I situate my self in relation to the subjective experience of my participants and the objective nature of the theory with which I identify, I found it helpful to re-examine areas of Bowen theory that deal with these issues.

The family systems model states that "Rather than a dichotomy, objective and subjective perceptions constitute a continuum" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 3). Systems thinking is based on a narrower definition of subjectivity and objectivity than is generally accepted by science.

Subjectivity is that which arises from "conditions" within the brain and sense organs and not directly caused by external stimuli. The important point to recognize is that the "conditions" within the brain and sense organs can vary in the following ways: (1) differences exist among individuals in the "conditions" that are average for their brains over time and (2) "conditions" in the same brain may fluctuate widely. The "conditions" of the brain and sense organs are influenced by factors such as emotional and feeling states and beliefs about the way things are. (p. 3)

Objectivity is that which belongs to the sensible world, that which we perceive with our senses. . . . An individual's position on the continuum is determined by the "conditions" of his brain and sense organs. (p. 3)

The human, unlike other animals, is able to distinguish between objectivity and subjectivity which is a function of the intellectual system. A person can be actively involved in an emotional system and, at the same time, recognize the nature of that involvement in its effects on themselves and on others.

Although Bowen's intention was to create a science of human behaviour, he did not claim complete success. Like all theories, family systems theory is a creation of the human brain and is therefore open to change (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). For Bowen (1978) the practical application of his theory to the individual and the family was paramount. He believed that "If a theory is worth anything, it should be useful in relation to the people who are the most important in one's personal life, that is, one's own family" (Sluzki, 1990, p. 342). With this in mind, clients are encouraged to develop person to person relationships with as many members of their family of origin as possible. This is accomplished by returning to family with what Bowen calls a "research" rather than a "blaming" stance. The intention is then to ask questions from a place of curiosity about other's experience in family. Through the exchanging of stories, stories are changed and subsequently, perspectives and the way people relate to one another are changed. Although Bowen did not use the term "intersubjective knowledge," it seems to me his practice reflected and promoted it. McGoldrick, Anderson & Walsh (1991) make the point that "The central objective in Bowen therapy is the differentiation of a self in *relation to others*... Bowen valued the importance of maintaining connectedness and repairing cutoff relationships in families" (p. 35). In addressing how Bowen fits with feminist values and beliefs, Lerner (1986) notes again the importance of connection and

communication to elicit more information about the perspectives and experiences of others.

Just as feminists continue to gather facts about "lost women" in history and revise history books to more accurately reflect women's experience, clients in Bowen work are guided through a similar journey with persons on "their own family tree." Through both Bowen work and feminism, a woman's sense of isolation about her so-called pathologies is replaced by an empathic understanding of the continuity of women's struggles through the generations and the ways in which she is both similar to and different from those who came before her. (p. 37)

A cornerstone of Bowen theory is that the family is a part of a naturally occurring system. Just as the solar system, the ant colony, the tides, and the cell, all sprang from the evolutionary process and are natural systems, so "the human and the human family are driven and guided by processes that are written in nature" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 27).

Bowen refers to the particular kind of natural system occurring in human families as an emotional system. This emotional system is present in all forms of life and enables an organism to receive information, integrate it, and respond on the basis of it. He believed this was an observable phenomenon based on scientific observation. "While Darwin established a physical link between man and the lower forms, Bowen's concept of the emotional system has provided a basis for establishing a behavioral link between humans and other animals" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 27).

Two other systems that Bowen recognizes are the feeling system and the intellectual system. The emotional system is particular to the animal kingdom, whereas, all three are present in man. "The emotional system

includes mechanisms such as those involved in finding and obtaining food, reproducing, fleeing enemies, and rearing young" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 28). Humans react on an emotional level but with a layer of feeling such as guilt, anger, shame which is not present in animals. The intellectual system includes the human's capacity to know, to understand and to communicate complex ideas. All of these systems mutually influence one another. In Bowen thinking "all life is systems" (p. 51).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information for locating my study in Bowen family systems theory. It is not intended to be an extensive review of theories on child behaviour. In particular it will highlight Bowen's understanding of the focused-on child. Although I refer to other systems theorists, my understanding of child-focus is based mainly on the work of Bowen.

Until the late forties human problems were conceptualized in terms of individual personality characteristics and behaviour patterns (Corsini & Wedding, 1995; Kerr & Bowen 1988). Some work had been developed around families in the early 1950's, but it was not until mid 1950 that family therapy entered psychiatric practice. The family movement was an outgrowth of psychoanalytic theory and, in the early years, was associated with schizophrenia. Through the work of Ackerman (1958), Bowen (1978), Haley, (1976), Minuchin (1974), Napier & Whitaker (1978), Satire (1972), and others, family therapy moved to a more general application which included families with less severe problems.

The Role of Anxiety

In viewing human behavior from a systems orientation, anxiety is seen as a major influence in all human interaction. While everyone experiences anxiety, the amount of anxiety experienced by people varies significantly over time (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Kerr & Bowen described two types of anxiety - acute and chronic. Chronic anxiety is learned in two ways: one by absorption of parental anxiety, the other by subjectively determined attitudes and beliefs.

There are many unproductive ways to bind anxiety such as drugs, alcohol, overeating, over-achieving, underachieving, overspending, and procrastinating. There are also productive ways to reduce anxiety such as yoga, exercise, and stress management activities. The ways in which people bind anxiety are almost endless. When anxiety overloads a family beyond their resources to manage it, they bind it within the relationship system in one of three ways: by a child focus, by marital fighting and/or distancing, or by an emotional or physical symptom in a spouse (Lerner, 1989; Bowen 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). My study looks at the binding of anxiety using a child-focus.

To some degree families are all child-focused. Children would not survive without this natural involvement of responsible adults. When parental concerns become overly intense, unrealistic and persistent, when they overshadow concerns for self-functioning, for a relationship to a spouse, for other children, for extended family members or for friends, a child-focused family process is operating (Krasner, 1989). This focus can manifest itself by some symptom in the child. The symptom can take the form of an emotional, a physical, or a relationship dysfunction. Societal attitudes create an atmosphere that encourages different symptoms. Bowen noted that in 1978 "there would appear to be a marked increase in the percentage of delinquency and behaviour problems . . . which appears to be in youngsters whose tensions would previously have been expressed more as internalized problems" (p. 274). Regardless of the symptom, this way of thinking frames it as an expression of a system-wide dysfunction through its most vulnerable member, the child as the symptom-bearer (Guerin & Gordon, 1984). This phenomenon, as noted by McGoldrick & Gerson (1985), is not new. They

have documented the process of child-focus in such famous families as John Quincy and Louisa Catherine Adams, Scott Fitzgerald, and Jackie Bouvier Kennedy.

Family Systems View in Contrast to an Individual Perspective

In a systems way of thinking, the child exhibiting the symptom is not the center of a therapeutic intervention. The main difference between an individual and a family approach is the shift of focus from a person to the relationship system (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). When a child is treated individually in psychotherapy and gets better, the family projection process is reinforced. As soon as the child goes into therapy, the level of family anxiety goes down and the child often improves. This further reinforces the notion that the problem lies within the child. In a systems view, disturbances that exist on one level are not blamed on disturbances that exist on another level. Neither the child nor the family is blamed for the problem (Bowen, 1978).

Lewis and his colleagues (1976) who worked with troubled children in a institutional setting noticed that when seemingly well children were sent home they would almost immediately assume their old problems. As a result of this observation, Lewis and his staff began to study families in order to find out what was going on inside them. They concluded that individuals cannot be studied alone but have to be looked at as part of a family system. Kuehl (1993) using a general systems approach verified the findings of Lewis (1976) stating that "human behaviour is best understood in context" (p. 262). Also supporting a systemic approach, Charles Figley, director of The Family Research Institute at Purdue University says: "The family is a system like a

spiderweb (sic). When you pluck one strand, the entire web is affected" (Curran, 1983, p. 259).

Widening the lens to include the entire family has far-reaching implications. Understanding the extended family relationship system can add much to the perspective on a dysfunctional child (Kerr, 1974). A person is not seen as an autonomous individual separate from his family and his multigenerational past. Kerr & Bowen (1988) claim that "The thoughts, feelings, and behavior of each family member, in other words, both contribute to and reflect what is occurring in the family as a whole" (p. 9).

Factors That Contribute to a Child-Focus

How does a child become the focus of attention in a family? This is a complicated process to which all members of the family, as well as the child who is focused on, contribute to in some way. It can begin long before the child is born. A child who is born after a miscarriage, is a first boy after several girls, is the "spitting image" of his alcoholic grandfather, is physically or mentally impaired, or has a difficult temperament - all are candidates for an intense child-focus (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). A child-focus can also be activated by traumatic life events or by inherited intergenerational reactivity that precipitates a high level of stress in the family (Kuehl, 1993). An example of intergenerational reactivity could center around the problem of alcohol. If the grandfather was an alcoholic and the grandson is found to be drinking, the reaction of the parents would most likely be far more dramatic than if alcohol had never been a family problem.

Kuehl (1993) also speaks of a systemic void which occurs when compensation is projected onto the child subsystem. The result is a very high

and unrealistic expectation of a specific child. The child who is focused on for compensation is often the oldest or youngest child or a child named after or replacing a specific family member.

A component that plays a central part in whether or not a child becomes the focus of the family's anxiety depends on the level of differentiation of the parents. Differentiation can be defined as the ability of a person to be connected yet separate from others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Kerr & Bowen described a person with a high degree of differentiation as "one who can maintain emotional objectivity while in the midst of an emotional system in turmoil, yet at the same time actively relates to key people in the system" (p. 473). If the parents are well differentiated, child-focus does not become a fixed problem. According to Schnarch (1991), children often become symptomatic when parent's level of differentiation is insufficient to modulate the degree of anxiety in the marital dyad or in the extended family system. Haley (1976) also sees unexpressed marital tension as contributing to a child-focus. He noted that "In most therapy with disturbed children, it can be assumed that if the parents could easily concede their marital difficulties, the child would not be expressing the problem. A child with a problem stabilizes a marital dyad" (p. 3). In situations where this occurs the parents develop a pseudo-relationship and, as noted by Carter & McGoldrick-Orfanidis (1976), come into therapy as a happily married couple with conflict appearing in their relationship with the child. Brandt & Moynihan (1971) confirm this thesis, saying couples with a child-focus describe their marriages as conflict free, except in the area of parenting.

Triangles in a Child-Focused Family

Axline (1976) concurs with others about the problems brought about by unexpressed anxiety in the marital dyad. He points out that marital and parental differences may be detoured through the child. In detouring, the parents submerge their conflicts and unite in order to protect or blame the child. The child, in turn, becomes the focus of all the family problems (Schultz, 1984; Frager, 1985). Kerr & Bowen (1988) refer to this process as triangling. The notion of child centered triangles is a clinically significant phenomenon that is accepted by family therapists (Guerin, Fogarty, Fay, Kautto, 1996). "Triangling" is an instinctual process that reflects the automatic emotional reactivity of human beings to one another (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). If there is a high level of differentiation in the parents, the triangle will remain flexible. The mother and child at times will be the close twosome while the father and the child at other times will be close. The majority of the time the parents will be the close twosome. When either parent becomes consistently close to a child, leaving the other parent in the outside position in the triangle, a child-focus is in operation. Triangles are driven by anxiety and formed to avoid the hard emotional issues between the members of a twosome. It is the collusion of the two, regardless of the particular pattern displayed (anger, love, clinging dependency), in relation to the third that is the defining characteristic of a triangle (Bowen, 1978; Lerner, 1989).

The primary parental triangle involves the mother, father, and symptomatic child. It is usually presented as an overly close relationship between the mother and child with father in the outside position (Guerin & Gordon, 1984). Because children are the least differentiated - which is directly

related to their stage of development - they are ready made for triangles. They absorb and detour anxiety from any source (Lerner, 1989). These triangles can be extraordinarily intense, depending on the level of anxiety fueling them.

An awareness of triangles is essential if changes are to be made in the child-focused family. In systems thinking, one brings about change by helping to restructure the way the system behaves. The parents in the family are the most critical subsystem to consider for change. If the parents have a relationship in which they do not need a scapegoat and do not use their children as a way to stabilize their relationship, then the children will not likely be negatively affected by the parents' difficulties. When a husband and a wife are experiencing problems in their marital relationship and try to solve them by involving the children, serious emotional or behavioral problems may show themselves in the children. Working with parents sets the stage for the entire family to redefine and restructure itself as a system (Freeman, 1991).

Focusing on self a major portion of the time and a well-functioning marital relationship preclude child-focus. If a child in a family begins to draw a disproportionate amount of focus, it is safe to suppose anxiety that properly belongs between the spouses has not been dealt with. When the child-focus is lessened, the marital problem emerges (Gilbert, 1991).

If parents work on the relationship problem between themselves, the child will respond with a reduction or disappearance of symptoms. Freed of the anxiety that was stifling personal progress, the child is able to get on with the process of developing a self. Symptoms can reappear but will be shorter lived and less severe. Anxious focus is replaced with confident interest. The child is left to solve her\his own life problems which is often how the

parents have approached the other children's problems. When parents continue to differentiate a self in all the emotional systems in which they are involved - clarifying boundaries, thinking, and moving on principle - everyone in the emotional system benefits, especially the children (Bowen, 1978).

Systems theory provides a useful perspective for understanding the effect of childhood behavior disorders on the family (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). However, it is important to emphasize a complete systems view which includes the nuclear family, the extended family, as well as the societal system. Family systems is not about blaming the parents for the ills of the child. It acknowledges the myriad of factors that contribute to a child-focus which include the child's genetic composition and environmental forces. Bernier & Siegel (1994) contend: "How the child is treated and raised can affect the severity of his problem but it cannot cause the problem" (p. 143).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Just as therapy in the real world is "messy," that is filled with sidebars and distractions and false paths, research is a messy process that we tidy up for publication. In the process, we leave out some of the most intriguing insights about the research enterprise and human interaction, and fail to teach our students what research is like in actual practice. (Sipe & Doherty, 1993, p. 109)

The following excerpt from my journal describes an example of research in the "real world."

My fifth participant was to come to the house at 9:45 this morning. My two boys, Nick and Dave, would long be at school and I would have time to prepare before she arrived. Not so. Nick's ride didn't show up, Dave's jeans weren't dry, and they both needed to be driven to school. Nick knew my participant so the moment she arrived he asked her for a ride. I drove Dave to school. We both returned at the same time and she informed me that she needed to be at work thirty minutes earlier than had previously been established. We were left with thirty-five minutes for our interview instead of the full sixty minutes we had planned. We decided to meet on another day.

What follows is an artifact of my research procedure. The procedure itself appears as a linear process moving coherently from one stage to the next. It was not. Time and space required that I skip many of the "false paths and sidebars" that were a part of my research journey. This section summarizes the major stops I made along the way.

Participants

I had hoped to recruit adolescents from Ledger House which is a live-in facility for children and adolescents who have exhibited unacceptable behaviour at home and in the community. My thinking was that participants from Ledger House would clearly be "the identified patient" in family and therefore fit with Bowen's definition of a "focused-on child." A lengthy clearance procedure prevented this from happening. I notified the ethics committee that I was now using a "sample of convenience." I made an announcement in my writing-research class. Two of my classmates suggested their children as possible candidates. After receiving permission, I contacted these adolescents by phone, explained the nature of my inquiry and arranged to meet with them. The remaining three participants were friends of my teenage sons.

I offered an honorarium of \$20.00 for two sessions. I did this for several reasons. As a first time researcher, I felt unsure about the willingness of adolescents to be in my study and I saw money as a good motivator. I also saw offering money as a way of protecting my participants. If family or friends questioned their reasons for taking part in this research they could simply say they were doing it for the money. In the final analysis, I believe the money was unnecessary. None seemed concerned about what others thought and three of the participants said talking about their difficulties was helpful and did not want to be paid.

The participants range in age from seventeen to nineteen, locating them in a time frame our culture refers to as adolescence. This period is characterized by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive and social changes. These changes open the gateway to adulthood. During this transition time

"some of the life's cycle's most important developments in aspiration, role, identity, and interaction patterns take place" (Gordon, 1972, p. 25). The unstable nature and unpredictability of these adolescent years generates anxiety in the adult population and as a result it receives an extreme amount of intense societal focus. The transition years between childhood and adulthood are demanding for both adolescents and adults.

The emotional changes of adolescence are based in part on cultural factors. According to Mercer (1991) "the period of adolescence is the period a culture defines it to be" (p. 439). All children experience puberty but how the culture goes about recognizing this event and changing its expectations is instrumental in how the adolescent develops. Most adolescents in our culture are not expected to support themselves, or take on the obligation of marriage and a family while in other cultures this pattern is the norm. In many ways the period of adolescence is only tenuously linked to chronological age. A period of special social status may extend over many years as in the case where people attend university for a long period of time or where economic necessity forces young people to remain at home and to be dependant upon their parents. The whole complex of development associated with this time is extremely variable. As well as cultural expectations, variations are based on genetics, nutrition, education and social setting.

Conducting the Interviews

Interviews with three of the participants were conducted in my home-office. One took place in the curriculum lab at the University of Victoria and another in the participant's home.

I met with each of them on two occasions for approximately one hour. At the initial meeting I outlined the nature of my inquiry, explained the limits of confidentiality, and had them sign a confidentiality agreement.

Before meeting with the participants, I prepared a number of questions keeping in mind the "rules of thumb" suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (1994).

1. Look for the meaning and perspectives of the participants in the study.
2. Look for relationships regarding the structure, occurrence, and distribution of events over time.
3. Look for points of tension: What does not fit? What are the conflicting points of evidence in the case? (p. 213)

The questions I asked were open-ended, providing opportunities for extensive personal exploration of the phenomenon being investigated. When general statements such as, "My sisters and I don't really get along," were given, I asked for examples. This led to rich descriptions of experience.

Each interview was audiotaped and later transcribed.

Transcribing

Aside from the painfully tedious activity of transcribing the spoken word to written text, several caveats need to be addressed. Kvale (1996) cautions the researcher that "Transcripts are not copies or representation of some original reality, they are interpretative constructions that are useful tools for given purposes" (p. 165). Interviews with my participants yielded one hundred and thirty-five pages of single-spaced text. Being familiar with the pitfalls of recording conversation, such as poor sound quality, I was prepared with an

excellent mike that enabled me to hear even the quietest responses. At one point during an interview the chair on which the mike was resting moved and the mike became dislodged from the tape recorder. Fortunately, I obtained enough of the conversation to supply the needed material. Keeping Kvale's (1996) warning in mind, I listened to the tapes a number of times before transcribing and re-listened after transcribing with the written transcripts in hand.

Triangulation

Throughout my research process, I engaged in a number of practices "hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). I consistently wrote about my thesis process, discussed it with my thesis group and others who had been or were involved in thesis or dissertation work, and revisited the literature as new areas of relevance emerged. I also returned many times to my primary data - the transcribed tapes of conversations with my participants and to my own responses to the interview questions.

My writings, which I referred to as "thesis thoughts," consisted of revelation, difficulties and possible directions of investigation. I often used Goldberg's (1990) timed writing exercise to move my inquiry when I found myself unable to proceed. I learned, as Goldberg states, "Writing is the act of discovery" (p. 60). By writing I would discover what it was I wanted to say. Congruent with this thinking, Oberg (1998) says that writing

which looks not for answers but for questions . . . is a process of finding something out, rather than a process for recording or reporting something

that has already been found out. This is writing which aims not to close in on an answer but to stay open to a question. (p. 1)

Staying open to the question of how I might accomplish the task of presenting the experience of my participants, I realized that the methodology I had decided upon before beginning my inquiry, although useful in some respects, was in the end, too limiting. I found that "Method cannot be set beforehand, but instead evolves through engagement with the object of thinking - that is the question" (Oberg, 1998, p. 1).

In coming to the most useful way to represent and analyze my participants experience, I involved myself in a mode of thinking which Nodding (1984) refers to as an "affective-receptive mode" which allows us to put ourselves quietly into the presence of the object. This, I believe, is related to the same process that Goldberg (1990) speaks of and to which I referred earlier. Nodding (1984) notes

It is, clearly, qualitatively different from the analytic-objective mode in which we impose structure on the world. . . . The receptive mode seems to be an essential component of intellectual work. We do not pass into it under stress. . . . Indeed we must settle ourselves, clear our minds, reduce the racket around us in order to enter it. (p. 34)

This is not to suggest we abandon rational thinking but that we move back and forth between the analytic and receptive mode. By approaching my data in this way, I arrived at a way of proceeding which I have documented in the following section.

A Search for Methodology

At the start of my inquiry I decided on a phenomenological approach. My question was: "What is the lived experience of being thought of as a difficulty in family?" After collecting and transcribing the data, I began by employing Van Manen's (1990) selective reading approach. I read the transcripts several times and looked for phrases or statements which appeared to be "essential" to the phenomenon being described. With successive readings of the text, it became more and more evident that each participant, although sharing commonalities of experience, had a particular issue about being a difficulty in family that overrode all other issues. And if, for example, I looked at the experience of "resistance" in each story I would miss being able to share Joseph's compelling story of being cast as the family scapegoat. If I isolated the theme of "giving up" by selecting phrases that supported this theme in all the stories, I would not be able to explore Noah's transformation from "not caring" to "caring." To me these stories provide the reader with an opportunity to understand the subjective experience of being thought of as a difficulty in family in greater depth than if I had collapsed each experience into meaning units or themes. I came to the realization that

There is no one best system for analysis. The researcher may follow rigorous guidelines described in the literature . . . but the ultimate decisions about the narrative reside with the researcher. Like the choreographer, the researcher must find the most effective way to tell the story, to convince the audience. . . . There is a danger in becoming so taken up with methods that the substantive findings are obscured. (Janesick, 1996, p. 215)

In addition to the practise of reducing the text to themes, I struggled with the notion of essentialism. The critical ingredient that makes a theme essential is that without this particular aspect "the phenomenon could not be what it is" (van Manen, 1992, p. 107). I'm not convinced that the themes I have explored can fulfill these requirements. What I do believe is that each person's experience is particular and it is in speaking of the particular that we come to some understanding of the universal. The individual experience is the site of knowledge and that knowledge applies not only to the situation being described but to a multitude of broader human issues. This way of viewing the construction of knowledge is supported by Krieger (1991) who states: "I continue in the methodological tradition of speaking specifically in order to speak generally" (p. 4).

The Interview

The research interview can be thought of as both a method and a methodology. I discussed earlier my use of the interview as a method. As a methodology the interview is a site for the construction of knowledge (Kvale, 1996). My focus is on inter-relational knowledge generated through conversation and the telling of stories. The interview conversation is of a specific form which seeks to obtain knowledge of the participant's world. As a participant tells stories, the researcher reacts and asks questions. In this way both the researcher and the researched come to new understanding about the subject of inquiry. Social constructivism recognizes this shift from the individual to the relationship as the locus of knowledge (Gergen, 1992). Kvale (1996) also stresses the inter-relational aspect of the interview deeming

it an inter-view "where the outcome is a coproduction of the interviewer and the subject" (p. xvii).

Narrative

I introduce my research findings in the form of first person narratives. These narratives are my constructions based on the transcribed tapes from interviews with my five participants. I have used the participants' words and only altered the original text for the sake of clarity. The chronological order of events has been changed to create a sequential story. If, for example, the participants spoke of their childhood in several places I combined these remembrances in one section of the narrative. It must also be remembered that I selected the themes and chose to present certain parts of the stories to support these themes.

In presenting stories that I have constructed in the first person, I collaborate with the constructivist view that points to the observer as the reference point of knowledge (Pare, 1995). These narrative accounts provide a forum for adolescents to tell "their story" of being perceived as a difficulty in family. The constructivist position recognizes that each member of the family would tell a different story and that no particular story is more true than the next. My intention, like Arvay (1997), is to "craft narratives that would engage the reader and bring to life the multiple interpretations that inform the creation of these narrative accounts" (p. 19).

Central to my choice of narrative as a way of presenting my findings is my belief that there are many ways of knowing. Narrative "transcends the rational" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. xii) accessing a different part of our being. An example of "knowing" in another way is cogently expressed by the

protagonists, Rosaleen, in Katherine Ann Porter's story *The Cracked Looking-Glass* (1979). In responding to a remark made to her by a young hooligan Porter says "Rosaleen understood in her bones before her mind grasped it." It is this kind of understanding that I hope to offer through the participants' narratives.

The second part of my analysis is presented as an interpretation of my understanding of the participant's experience through a number of lenses; in particular, Bowen family systems theory. Bowen's theory consists of eight interlocking concepts. The data did not provide enough information to address each of these concepts. I therefore only examined the most salient issues that emerged which could be interpreted from a Bowen perspective. By engaging the reader in both processes - affective receptive and analytic-instrumental - I believe a more complete understanding of the adolescent's experience is possible.

The use of narrative in psychology is not new. Since Freud psychology has relied on the case study of the individual as a way of explicating, reworking, and substantiating theory (Parry & Doan, 1994). Theories are always up for revision so there needs to be constant interaction between what the individual says and does and the theory. Allport spoke with poignant insight about this interplay.

Psychologists are on safe ground so long as they talk in abstractions about personality-in-general. Their real test comes when they attempt to explain (or guide or therapeutically treat) a single concrete life. In reflecting on the case of Jenny I find myself wishing that I could take refuge in vague generalizations, but invariably she pins me down with the unspoken challenge, "And what do you make of me?" (Craik, Hogan, Wolfe, 1993, p. 153)

By offering the participants' stories, as well as a theoretical account, an essential connection is made between theory and subjective experience.

Metaphors

In the telling of their stories, the participants, with the exception of Noah, use a metaphor that epitomizes and amplifies their particular experience of being thought of as a difficulty in family. Joseph's expression "getting heat" describes his experience of feeling blamed. Moses's apt metaphor "holding my hand" represents his struggle for independence. Ester's "getting your back up" speaks of her defensiveness and resistance. While Naomi's "walking on egg shells" depicts the hyper-vigilant posture she assumes at home. Although not a metaphor, Noah's phrase "feeling like I didn't care" dramatizes his experience of hopelessness.

Participant-Researcher Relationship

I found many similarities between the counsellor-client relationship and the researcher-participant relationship. Sitting with my participants, discussing the troubles they were having in their families, was a familiar experience for me. As a counsellor, I have done this many times over the years. Osborne (1990), speaking about the relationship between the counsellor and the researcher in descriptive interpretive methodologies, says, "Personal qualities such as warmth, caring, openness, positive regard for others, ethical integrity and responsibility are important requisites for both" (p. 89). Kegan (1982) writes of the importance of a "special kind of empathy" that all professionals who concern themselves with another's growth, including

researchers, need to have. This empathy means that practitioners convey their understanding of the experience of the person with whom they are working "in the way he or she experiences it" (p. vii).

After meeting with my first participant I addressed a number of these issues in my journal writing.

I quickly learned that investigating the phenomenon was not a simple matter of asking questions and recording responses. This is difficult work. Sustained engagement with the subject of the experience of being a difficulty in family pushes the participant to a place of considerable discomfort. Many times during the interview the participant stepped back from the subject and retreated into an unrelated story. I see this as a healthy activity which protects the client/participant from revealing more than he/she is ready to share. In counselling we speak of teaching the client "containment." It is part of the counsellors job to prevent a client from "spilling" a term used to describe the act of revealing too much, too soon, thereby leaving one feeling vulnerable, over exposed, and often ashamed.

There were two major intersections at which the role of researcher and counsellor diverged. One concerned the structure of the relationship and the other the change process. In the researcher-participant relationship, the needs of the researcher are in the forefront, while in the counsellor-client relationship the needs of the client are front and center. In the former relationship the agenda is set by the researcher, in the latter by the client. Even though the counsellor makes decisions as to what is paid attention to and as to what is ignored, it is the client who sets the direction of exploration. The counsellor is always mindful of what is most helpful to the client. As a researcher I decided on the area of discussion, and directed the participants'

attention to what I saw as important for my investigation. At times I found the tension between my need and the participant's obvious need to pursue a different direction an ethical challenge. I managed this tension by being particularly aware of signs of distress in my client. My purpose, as a researcher, was not to assist in the change process but to shed some light on the phenomenon under study. When participants slipped into stories unrelated to my inquiry, I acknowledged the difficulty they were experiencing but did not pursue their story line. At the first available opportunity, I gently steered them back to the subject of inquiry. I kept in mind that ultimately it would not be in their best interest to move into a counselling relationship. Before embarking on this work, the content and structure of our relationship had been established. I felt I had an ethical responsibility to honor that contract. At the end of our final session I invited the participants to call me if they had any questions or if difficulties arose (Appendix A, p. 162). The consent form also provided names and phone numbers of my joint supervisors who were available to discuss any problems that could possibly arise.

The blurring of boundaries between counsellor and researcher were not felt by me alone. An amusing exchange on the subject took place with one participant.

Noah: I hate counselling basically. No offense.

Susanne: That's okay. The last person said the same thing.

Noah: I went to the family violence project to phase 1 of it. It was alright but most counselling I just don't like. I don't know something about it. I

find it hard to know why people want to get inside your head. I guess this is sort of like that.

Susanne: Yeah it is.

Noah: But I'm willing to. A lot of times when I've gone to counselling it's when I wasn't willing.

Susanne: Oh I see. You were made to go.

Noah: It's not going to help me if I'm made to go.

Susanne: Well this is actually meant to help me not to help you.

Noah: Yeah I know but it's still a kind of counselling.

Susanne: That's right it is like counselling in a way.

Noah: It's the same idea. It can help both people. It relieves a lot of stress.

Another participant responded in the following way when I asked him about his "research experience."

Joseph: Basically it's counselling. . . . I've enjoyed both these sessions. It's totally a good way to get it out. It's a good way to reflect on old memories. Even if they're bad they're still memories with your family and you still think about them.

Susanne: And sometimes when you tell a story it takes some of the punch out of it so if something is painful in the past . . .

Joseph: Yeah exactly. Every time you talk about it you feel a little better.

Until the last five minutes of the last interview, I managed to keep the counsellor in check or using Krieger's (1991) expression I "cornered off" my counsellor self. My journal entry acknowledges my discomfort and struggle.

Interestingly, in the last moments of my last interview I spoke to my participant about the power she has to change things in her relationship with her mom even if her mom never changes. My first reaction to listening to myself on the tape was not to listen. I fast forwarded my bit, but later, on rethinking my reaction, decided to see how I might relate my response to this research. I think perhaps it was my wanting to be a counsellor, not a researcher - knowing that people can change their lives by making small but significant changes - that prompted my reply. Spiegel & Linn (1969) talk about the importance of a small change that can make a big difference in a person life. They speak of a "ripple effect" and note that only minimal changes are needed to initiate movement, and that once the process is in motion further changes will be initiated by the client. On some level I knew this was my last gasp, my last chance to involve a participant - any of my participants - in changing the situation in which she found herself. It was late. I had been with this person for an hour and forty minutes and I was tired but somewhere I dredged up the strength to give her my take on what was happening. I have great compassion for these kids and I guess for myself as a child in a similar situation, and I needed to speak my truth. These kids are doing the best they can to cope in a situation where they perceive themselves as having little power or choice. I wanted them all to know that their lives could be different. I had kept my mouth tightly closed and avoided asking them questions that might shift the focus from research to counselling. When I was going over the tape and saw my two pages of input, I cringed and thought, "Well nobody needs to know I had quite so much to say. This stuff isn't really relevant to my research anyway. I'll just skip it." Well what I had to say was relevant and spoke to the link between researcher, counsellor and participant. As a counsellor I wanted to give my participant something, something to think about, something that might make a difference in her life.

Social science researchers who work with a vulnerable population often experience the dilemma in which I found myself. In some cases, researchers offer subjects a return for service by organization follow-up groups which may include therapy or consultation (Kvale, 1996). The feeling of wanting to give something back to those involved in the research we do is common. Krieger (1991) managed this predicament by recognizing the altruistic gift of those who participate in research.

They are contributing to the development of knowledge, not knowing where that development will lead or exactly how it will impact them. They believe that some attempt to bring things out into the open, and to clarify them in more than one mind, is better than no attempt. They may have other beliefs and hopes as well (self-aggrandizement, for instance), but my point is that social science, at its best, is a gift of freedom. (p. 153)

One of my participants expressed Krieger's sentiment. On our initial introduction on the phone Ester told me she was taking part in this research to help out other kids who many find themselves in her situation. On our first meeting I read her the dedication from *Too Scared to Cry*: "The participants in a research study seldom benefit directly from that study. Instead they give a gift to others" (Terr, 1990). Her response was

That's why I wanted to do this so I could help out others. . . . Kids need to realize that they are not the problem and they need to have people like counsellors tell them that. . . . You have to explain that more. I've had lots of counsellors in my life and no one ever said that to me. Everyone looked at me as a problem.

Validity

Validity from a positivist perspective draws a firm line between what is true and what is untrue. In qualitative research validity is re-conceptualized, acknowledging multiple ways of knowing and multiple truths (Denzin, 1994; Kvale, 1996). Neither the participants' narratives nor my interpretation of these narratives are to be taken as "a mirror of reality" but as "the social construction of reality" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), where the focus is on the interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the social world (Kvale, 1996). In offering possible interpretations, both mine and the participants', I adhered to a number of practises. I adopted the notion of validity as strength (Kvale, 1996) which takes into account reflexivity, congruence, usefulness of knowledge and the judgement of the reader.

Reflexivity

"Reflexivity of social science" is spoken of by Sandra Harding (1987) as the relationship between the researcher and the object of research. She says, "We need to avoid the "objectivist" stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects beliefs and practices to the display board" (p. 9). With this in mind, I began my inquiry by putting myself in the role of participant. A "researcher" who has a similar background in counselling, asked me questions which I had prepared in advance. These questions were open-ended allowing for story telling and exploration. Later, I asked these same questions of my participants. After writing narratives and analyzing my participants' responses, I returned to my interview and wrote a narrative account of my

experience in family in much the same way I had done for each participant. This method immersed me in the phenomenon and moved my thinking to greater depths than if I had stood outside the phenomenon and merely observed what was happening for others.

Congruence

Here, congruence is related to validity in terms of "strength of relationship between content, process and form" (Hoskins, 1998, p. 8). In sorting out how to use a positivist theory while acknowledging many postmodern views, I appropriated the term "theory story" put forth by Daly (1997). The theoretical story is "provisional rather than definitive, and directive rather than conclusive" (p. 358). In this sense, I used theory to inform my understanding of what was going on for myself and my participants but in no way did I feel compelled to use my data to substantiate or prove the theory.

Usefulness

There has been a shift in thinking of validity as a means of separating true from false to validity as usefulness. Kvale (1996) notes that "Today, the legitimation question of whether a study is scientific tends to be replaced by the pragmatic question of whether it provides useful knowledge" (p. 42). The knowledge I have gained from speaking with adolescents about their experience in family has enhanced my own understanding personally and professionally. Their thoughts and observations pushed me to reexamine and articulate my position in family and how my present life is affected by my former status as a difficulty. For those who work with families, I believe the stories and interpretations may precipitate a greater awareness of how

families manage their anxiety and generate a greater compassion for the adolescent who is seen as "the problem child." In many ways the usefulness of this study is compatible with what Oberg (1988) states is the contribution of the phenomenological study.

What phenomenological study contributes to practical action is a sensitivity and understanding which enables the actor to decide more wisely what is in the best interest of those with whom he or she works. In neither kind of study ought the writer to make specific recommendations about what should be done. Rather, the researcher should point to the possibilities of acting in more informed and sensitive ways on the basis of what he or she has found or come to understand. (p. 7)

Judgement of the Reader

Ultimately validity is left to the judgement of the reader. I have offered my participants' interpretations of their experience in the form of narratives followed by my interpretations of these accounts. I have supported my data with references to the interview text and to the theories of others. Lee Cronbach, who is said by Bruner (1990) to be "an austere guardian of methodological purity of psychology" (p. 108) says, "Validity is subjective rather than objective: the plausibility of the conclusion is what counts. And plausibility, to twist a cliché, lies in the ear of the beholder" (p. 108).

CHAPTER 4: THE PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES AND AN INTERPRETATION

Joseph's Story: "Getting Heat"

There are three boys in our family with me in the middle. I'm in grade twelve but I won't exactly be graduating in the spring. I'll have to go back for another term next fall to finish up. When we lived in England my dad was the one who was working and my mom was the one who looked after me. We came here when I was five and my parents switched roles and I think that's got something to do with their relationship not being as good as it should be. Also there's a fifteen year age gap. Our family is different, sort of backwards. I know my dad doesn't want to do what he does. He wants to be working and making the money. He'll put a smile on his face but he'd rather work.

It's been a constant battle in our family for six or seven years. It's my mom that gets on my case not my dad. I have a bit of a temper when people get on my nerves and push my buttons and my mom does it very well. She'll push a button and then she'll push some more. She knows what gets me going and on various occasions she's got me going and I'll just fly off the handle. A good example was when I was in grade eight. I'm not very good at school. I'm not really a school person. When I got bad marks I'd come home and expect to get yelled at. When I was in grade eight, I got a substantially better report card and I started to get yelled at. I just couldn't understand why I'd be yelled at. My mom said, "You've been screwing up your life for years.

Why couldn't you have been doing this before?" And I just didn't get why she couldn't have said, "This is great. Let's try and continue."

There have been so many occasions when I just can't believe her, can't understand what she talking about. Another time that we got into a big fight was over getting money for clothes. I get a clothing allowance. It started three years ago because we would get clothes we didn't need so my parents decided to set up a clothing allowance which we would handle ourselves. One Saturday I asked my mom for my clothing allowance and she said, "That's fine but I'd like your room to be cleaned," so I cleaned my room. Then I asked for my allowance again and she said, "I'd like the lawn to be cut," so I went out and cut the lawn, came back and asked again and she said, "No, this time I'd like the bathroom to be cleaned," so I cleaned the bathroom and after I'd done those chores I said, "Mom can I have my clothing allowance?" She said, "I don't have any money," and she left and went on her walk. I just couldn't believe she wouldn't say, "Look, I don't have any money right now." She made me do all this busy work. I just got so mad at that and then my dad and my brothers came home - it seems that they're all kind of against me when I get mad at my mom. I don't know how it works - there are four men and one lady and so when I get mad at the lady they all help her, which is understandable, I guess. It just happens like that, so it's sometimes pretty hard. Everybody blames me and defends my mom.

The same kind of thing happened with my mom at Thanksgiving. We were all supposed to go to Los Angeles but at the last minute my mom decided not to come. I said, "Why aren't you going to come? It's a family trip." She goes, "I just can't handle your school." I just couldn't understand. Maybe it is stressful for her but it's stressful for me too. I'm the person who's

the most stressed out because it deals with me. And that was her reason. Right before we left, we went for a walk and we got into a fight about why she wasn't coming. I told her, "If you don't want to come on the trip that's fine but don't you dare blame me. It's not my fault. You're choosing not to come. How can it be my fault? Dad's going and he's dealing with my marks." My dad had already purchased the ticket and you can't get refunds and . . . "Why don't you come? We've got a place for you, we've got a ticket. Maybe it would be the perfect thing, get away, talk about it." But she just didn't come.

Lately, my little brother's been getting into trouble and I'm getting blamed for that as well. One time he and his friend were breaking windshield wipers, just childish things. He was brought home by the police because he got caught and when they came in my mom just looked at me and said I can't believe you. I said, "what are you talking about?" She thinks that I brought Mike up because he saw what I used to do. My parents think that I taught Mike these ways and it's not fair because he's old enough to think for himself. He tries to excuse his behaviour by saying that he's seen what I've done. It seems that when anything happens in the family I get heat - the family scapegoat I guess.

It seems the more trouble I had at home the more my friendship grew with my friends. I was always fighting with my parents and my brothers but whenever I was with my friends I was relaxed and having a good time. I didn't like to fight and when I was with my family I'd always be fighting. If you started fighting with your friends that would be so harsh because you'd have no place to go. I'd forget about the trouble I was having at home when I was at work or with my friends but when I was by myself that's all I'd usually think about.

My dad's the mediator in the family. I don't really talk much to my mom because when we're in an argument she just states her fact and then as I'm about to speak she gets up and walks away and says, "I can't handle this, I can't handle this," so I just end up talking with my dad about it. If I have a blow up with my mom I might go down to my room or outside to get some air and my dad will come and talk to me about what's going on. I like those talks because my dad gives me another view. He tries to explain what my mom's doing - like she's stressed out about her job or something like that. He defends my mom. He tries to play on both teams but if he takes my mom's side I understand. It doesn't matter to me. He told me, "I'll support your mother because if I don't the family could break up." About a year ago I realized that I just had to stay away from her, still talk to her just not deal with her as much and deal through my dad. I also realized that I had to deal through myself and be more independent. That was a big step and our relationship has gotten a little better.

My dad's a lot older and I when I was younger the worse fear for me was him dying before I grew up. Sometimes when I was in bed I would cry myself to sleep just thinking about it. I'll fight with my dad on occasion but we always get over it. He's always been the close one. Four years ago my parents were on the brink of divorce and that was a really tough time because my dad was going to go and live in France I would have had to live with my mom. They somehow worked it out but my dad is the one who keeps it going, keeps it all together.

When we were in Los Angeles my dad had my brothers and me write about different things. My dad wrote about what he thinks is wrong with the family. I wrote that my mom was a big concern because I don't think she's

reasonable enough. She just states her fact and then leaves the conversation. What I wrote was completely different than Ian's and Mike's because a lot of their problems seem to revolve around me. It seems if I'm in a good mood then my family is in a good mood but if I am in a bad mood I'll bark at someone and get in a temper so then everyone is in a bad mood. They all said that my temper is a big problem and I tell them I never lose my temper by myself, like no one ever loses their temper by themselves through their own actions. There is always someone to provoke me whether it be Ian or Mike or mom or dad and they sort of understood. I'll make you angry but I'll get more angry because of my nature and they came to grips with that. We had a nice talk about it and sort of smoothed things out.

Two years ago we went to counselling for the problems I had but we didn't really solve anything because my mother always wanted to be there and it would always end up me fighting with her and then the counsellor would ask her to leave and I would just be so enraged that I'd say, "I'm not going to do this." It was my mom's idea to go to counselling and I went through a stage when whatever she said I'd say, "No, I'm not going to do that." She would never help me out so why should I help her. And with my mom sometimes just to look at her I'd get angry - all the things she'd done, all the rules, all the things she'd said. I'll just have to leave. My parents don't like how I go out on school nights but a lot of it's just to get out of the house, just to have my space.

I used to see myself as the family problem but not anymore. I felt a lot of hurt and confusion. I just felt I didn't have a place. They would always say that my temper was a big problem but I say that it takes someone to trigger my temper. I don't just fly off the handle for no reason. I'm not sure that they

understand that and I'll say that I was a problem but that it takes two to make a problem. When they pushed me I'd lose my temper and I would snap but then, when they didn't push me, I'd try and be as nice as I could just to show them the complete difference. What I was saying to them was, "Look, I'm doing pretty good," but then when they turned around and started getting on my nerves I'd return the favor and get on their nerves.

I've had a severe temper for as long as I can remember. I just couldn't control it. I guess that's why its called a temper because you can't control it. So I just fought and fought and flew off the handle. But now I'm finding different ways of dealing with things instead of just yelling. If you think about it once your temper's down, you've cooled down, nothing's really changed. You're worn out and you can't deal with anything. You've got to wait for the next day. You've got to be calm and think things out before you start yelling and swearing.

A big problem with my mom is her not letting me grow up. A good example is me not being allowed to get my licence. I think it holds me back with my peers. A driver's licence is a big jump towards turning into a grown up. She doesn't budge on an issue like that. If we tried to talk and work things out then maybe it would be better but she seems not to want to do that. She states her fact and then she'll leave. Case closed and she'll walk away. So it's tough to talk to someone like that.

I think the thing with all the problems we've had is my mom not understanding me and me loosing my temper. Like it's both sides. I've been a problem. I'm not blaming my mom for the problem. I was a big part of it. It is hurtful to me because I sort of wrecked the relationship as well. I just hope that sometime - because I know my mom blames me for a lot of things -

but I hope some time she'll say I wasn't the perfect person either, like just take some of it off my shoulders. That's when our relationship will get a lot better because in counselling I've gone up to her and said, "Look the problem is me but I hope you realize that you are also the problem. It takes two to tango." I don't know if she'll ever come up and say anything to me but I just hope that she thinks that way because that would be a big step in our relationship.

My brothers don't actually have as much of a problem with my mom as I do. Ian's just doesn't get into trouble and when Mike gets into trouble it seems like it's always focused on me. He gets some heat and he gets grounded once in awhile. I've seen him fight with my parents but it always gets smoothed out. Maybe I hold a grudge against my mom because I just don't think she's being fair. Maybe Mike lets it go. I don't actually know.

I think a big part of the problem is being the middle child. I'm just stuck in the middle. Where should I go? There's no place for me. The responsible place is already taken by the older one and the little one's already taken as well and that's when you sort of backlash, you sort of rebel. When I'm flying off the handle people are definitely noticing and you feel well now I'm the problem child and you get into a routine. Lately my tempers got a lot better and I guess through maturing I found out that there's a place for me. I'm Joseph. Ian is Ian and Mike is Mike. I'm a middle child not by choice or by action. It's just the way it is so I don't have to be the problem child any more.

I want to get along with my mom, I love her but there's just something that doesn't click and we just don't get along. I don't know what it is. It's a missing link. My mom and I just don't have it. I totally get along with my brothers. I totally get along with my dad. I think part of the reason I get

along with my dad is that we play golf together but then my mom plays it as well but you know the missing something. We just don't get along. I don't think we'll ever have the relationship that my brothers have even when I'm older, which is a shame, and I don't honestly feel I can do anything about it.

If a miracle happened and I was no longer thought of as a difficulty in my family I would know just by looking at my mom's face. I'd look at her and she'd be smiling. We'd both be smiling. I'd give her a hug. All the years of tension would be gone. We'd both be happier, more vibrant and there would just be more love there. I know the love is there. You just have to find it sometimes.

My relationship with my brothers would be different too. I'm close with both of them but there are days when we just can't stand each other and I guess those days would be fewer and far between. There would be an occasional attitude but we'd just get along more. Ian sort of thinks that he's above me and Mike because he gets better marks in school and he gets along with my parents. But he's not above me and I'm not above Mike. We would just feel equal to each other. Actually, our whole family would be more equal, just sort of a nice circle instead of a lot of bumps.

It's hard to think of how my relationship with my dad would be different because I've always gotten along with him. I guess he'd lose his job as the mediator but I'm sure that's a job he wouldn't mind losing. Instead of talking about troubles I'm having with my mom we'd talk about golf and sports. We'd have happy conversation. Lots of the conversations we used to have were him trying to help me out of a spot, trying to pick my spirits up. They're great conversations but I think that conversations are better when you are both feeling good and you're both talking. We'd be helping each

other. I'd have stuff to give him. He'd have stuff to give me. You'd be able to see the happiness in his eyes too. He'd have the biggest smile on his face. The war would be over and he'd be ecstatic about that.

Blame

When I began my inquiry, I assumed that a common theme running through the experience of being thought of as a difficulty in family, would be blame. My assumption proved to be correct. Each participant's story elucidates to a greater or lesser extent the experience of blaming and being blamed. Joseph's story offers the most cogent illustration of this theme.

A term that has come to be synonymous with blame is the word scapegoat. Joseph used the expression "family scapegoat" to describe his role in family. It is interesting to note that the notion of finding one person responsible for difficulties in a family, or in any group for that matter, is so common in our culture that a seventeen year old would choose to describe himself in this way. Many expressions such as "Luddite" or "turn coat," at one time familiar to the majority or the population, have passed from usage. The human tendency to blame others is so universal that the notion of a scapegoat has endured and the word has become part of common speech. The World Book Encyclopedia (1988) entry by Gary C. Porton states, "Today when someone refers to a person as a scapegoat, it means he has been made to take the blame for something which is the fault of another" (as cited in Pillari, 1991, p. 4).

The notion of scapegoating according to Frazer (1920) goes back to antiquity and is as old as society itself. It is a central theme in the creation story proffered by Jews and Christians. When God asked Adam why he ate the apple from the tree of knowledge, Adam replied, "The women made me do it." Eve in turn said, "The serpent made me do it." The practise of scapegoating was well entrenched long before the term came into use. As an actual practise scapegoating originated with the Israelites. Once a year they

figuratively heaped the sins of the people onto a goat and sent it into the wilderness to die, so relieving them of their sins. Later in the new testament, Christ became the sacrificial lamb and took upon himself the "sins of the world." In classical Rome on the Ides of March, a man was processed through the streets, beaten with rods and driven out of the city. The man represented the people's sins of the past year which need to be exorcised at the beginning of the new Roman year. (Frazer, 1920).

In any family where a child is presented as a difficulty, blame is a major dynamic in which all members of the family participate. To avoid becoming a part of this dynamic myself, I remind the reader of my systems perspective. As Pillari (1991) carefully points out

Parents and their children are the victims of their upbringing. Whenever there was a revelation of their own family history, it showed that the parents as children were victimized and ill-treated by their own parents. In turn, these adult children of such parents abused their own children as they did not know any better. There was a carryover of destructive entitlement from one family to another or from one generation to the next. Thus the legacy lived on. (p. xv)

Blame is a natural outgrowth of a cause-and-effect way of thinking. In this type of model a primary disturbance on one level is said to "cause" whatever disturbances exist on other levels. A systems model contrasts with this way of viewing human relations. It holds that symptoms reflect the overall functioning of the family and are not caused by a specific event. An incident may trigger a symptom but that incident itself is not the cause. Any understanding of a physical, psychiatric, or behavioral disorder must include information derived from all levels of investigation, intercellular to societal.

(Bowen, 1978) "A model that can incorporate all the facts and their interrelationship, without ascribing cause to any one fact, is a "systems model" (Kerr, 1992, p. 102).

The Dialectic of Blame

In my attempt to make sense of what I saw happening in Joseph's family I arrived at the conception of blame as a dialectic. This dialectic or "investigating of the truth of opinions" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1982) leads those involved to a dichotomous choice. For the parent, the dialectic of blame establishes an oscillating rhythm. The two contradictory responses to the acting out child's behaviour are to blame oneself or to blame the child. To an extent, the same dialectic of blaming is present in the scapegoated child although, the dependency of the child upon the parents pushes the child towards self-blame. Neither of these two opposing psychological responses allows for integration where each accepts responsibility for his/her part in the process. In everyday living the alternation between self-blame and blaming the child creates havoc in the parent-child relationship, where a clear path of action is not possible. The parents are either too strict or too lenient. At one time the child's behaviour may be criticized and severely punished while at another time the same behaviour will be either ignored or subtly rewarded.

The dialectic of blame is not limited to parents and children but includes those who work with families. It is also the predominant way of thinking in society at large. I was associated with a team of counsellors involved with families who presented with an acting-out child as the problem. During the six month period when the counsellors worked with the family, I heard such statements as "Behind Mary's (the mother) sweet requests of Peter I can hear

so much resentment. She's the one with the problem." At other times I heard the opposite response, "Peter really had something wrong with him. You wouldn't believe what he did." In an effort to explain what was happening in this family, comments fluctuated between blaming the parent or blaming the child.

In the process of doing my research, I became aware of the dynamic of blame on a larger scale. When I began a search for participants I considered using adolescents from Ledger House since the adolescents in this program were designated problems in their families. After speaking with the person who approves research proposals I wrote in my journal

This is not a popular stance! I have just spoken to D. who questioned whether present research supports the idea that an acting-out child is a systems problem to which all members of the family contribute. She said, "I don't know how well received this project will be at Ledger House because we really support parents. The parents come to live and watch what the staff do so they can learn how to manage." She said if I "corrected" those statements in my proposal that, to her, appeared to be putting the blame on the parent "they" might be more likely to support my research. She said the effect of having one of these children live at home had not been well documented. What was it like for parents to get a baby sitter? How much stress does the child place on the marriage? These questions all point to the child as the problem, not the family system. They are also directed at the parent's experience: I want to look at the child's experience.

There is often lip service paid to the fact that the parents may be doing something wrong; ultimately the focus returns to the symptomatic member, the acting-out child. The child is the most vulnerable person in the family system. It is always easier and requires less thought to blame him/her for the

family problems than to look at the symptomatic person as expressing the family anxiety. Kerr & Bowen (1988) explain that the unwillingness to tolerate anxiety leads humans to take an either/or position

In Joseph's family, all members blame him for most of the family problems. If there is a dispute with his mother everyone accuses him of being in the wrong.

It seems they are all kind of against me when I get mad at my mom. I don't know how it works - there are four men and one lady and so when I get mad at the lady they all sort of help her which is understandable. It just happens that way.

He opens our first session with a story involving his mother and school.

I'm not very good at school, I'm not really a school person. When I got bad marks I'd come home and expect to get yelled at. When I was in grade eight I got a substantially better report card than I usually got and I started to get yelled at for it. I just couldn't understand why I'd be yelled at - it's my mom that gets on my case not my dad - and my mom would say you've been screwing up your life for years. Why couldn't you have been doing this before. And I just couldn't understand why she couldn't have said, "This is great let's try and continue."

In this incident, Joseph finds himself in a double bind where the meaning of the message is "undecidable" (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, as cited in Pillari, 1991). Is his mother pleased or angry that he has done well? According to Pillari (1991) this no win situation is a common dynamic found in families who scapegoat one of their members.

Confusion is a common word Joseph uses to describe the feeling he experiences in his relationship with his mother. On one occasion he remembers being told to do his chores for allowance only to be informed when they were complete that there was no money to pay him. A particularly significant and painful incident occurred when his mother blamed his poor school performance for her decision to miss a family holiday.

Because sometimes I just don't understand her reasoning. You know we went to San Francisco. My mom didn't come because . . . I said, "Why aren't you going to come? It's a family trip." She goes, "I just can't handle your school." I just couldn't understand. Maybe it is stressful for her but it's stressful for me to. I'm the person who's the most stressed out because it deals with me. And that was her reason. And I just couldn't understand. Right before we left we got into a fight about why she wasn't coming because my dad had already purchased the ticket and you can't get refunds and . . . "Why don't you come? We've got a place for you, we've got a ticket. Maybe it would be the perfect thing - get away, talk about it." But she just didn't come.

In a recent event, Joseph recounts the following story of being blamed for something his brother did.

Mike and his friend were breaking windshield wipers, just childish things. He was brought home by the police because they got caught and when they came in my mom just looked at me and she said, "I can't believe you." I said, "what are you talking about?" She thinks that I brought Mike up by looking at what I used to do. It seems that anything in the family - there's some blame on me and my parents think that I taught him these ways and it's not fair because Mike's old enough to think for himself and it's not fair to blame it on me but they just think that I brought Mike up.

Children who are scapegoated often accept responsibility for the action of others. According to Pillari (1991) "the scapegoat internalizes and learns to take responsibility for someone else's problems and burdens and becomes the burden-bearer of the family" (p. 80). To some extent, Joseph appears to have resisted his family's attempts to hold him responsible for their actions and decisions. In the incident where the mother decided not to go on the holiday because of Joseph's school performance he told her

If you don't want to come on the trip that's fine but don't you dare blame me. It's not my fault. You chose not to come. How can it be my fault? My dad's going and he's dealing with my marks. I don't know. She was just being a weird-o.

Joseph views his position as a middle child as a consequential part of the difficulties he experiences. He is the second born in a sibling configuration of three boys.

I say it's being the middle child. I couldn't find my place. You'll have irritation with the older one and the younger one but I'd say in general it's the middle person just because there's no place for me. The responsible one's already taken. The little ones already taken. I'm just stuck in the middle. Where should I go? And that's when you backlash. You sort of rebel. Maybe when I'm flying off the handle people are definitely noticing and you sort of feel well now I'm the problem child and you sort of get into the routine of being the problem child.

Bowen (1978) would support Joseph's contention that his family position has significance. The middle child is commonly referred to as the "forgotten child." Bowen stated, "Based on my research and therapy, I believe that no single piece of data is more important than knowing the sibling position of

people in present and past generations" (p. 385). Bank & Kahn (1982) also make a strong case for Joseph's explanation of how he came to be the "problem child."

If all of the "positive" identities have already meted out, a child may be relegated to the role of the family black sheep or the identified patient. Some, though not all family systems need to fill these roles; they need a sacrificial lamb to burn, a scapegoat to absolve them of their sins, a fool to laugh at. (p. 101)

Joseph's blameworthiness in the eyes of his brothers is illustrated in the following example. During a family holiday - the one where his mother stayed at home - the father had the boys write about what they thought was "wrong with the family."

I wrote that my mom was a big concern because I don't think she's reasonable enough. Mine was completely different to Ian's and Mike's because a lot of their problems seem to evolve around me because if I'm in a good mood I think my family is in a good mood but if I'm in a bad mood I'll bark at anyone who I see so I'll get in a temper so then everyone is in a bad mood.

Pillari (1991) notes that our siblings, as our original peer group, our first standard of comparison, dictate how we measure up and how we fit into our family.

Although the father is the one member of the family who appears to be on Joseph's side and who acts as a mediator between him and his mother, Joseph knows ultimately his father will support his mother.

He's told me "I'll support your mother because the family could break up." He has to support her. He defends my mom. He tries to play both teams but if he takes my mom's side I understand. It doesn't matter to me.

The role of mediator, in this case played by the father, is consistent with Bowen's concept of "triangling" in a child-focused family. He says that when there is a symptomatic child one parent is overly close or over-involved with the child while the other parent is in a distant, critical position (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Joseph's comment about the relationship he has with his parents acknowledges this dynamic.

I don't really talk to my mom because when I'm in an argument she'll state her fact and then as I'm about to speak she'll get up and walk away and say "I can't handle this, I can't handle this." So I can't really talk to her so I just end up talking to my dad about it. He tries to explain what my mom's doing.

As the last several examples suggest, Joseph is aware of the workings of his family. His often thoughtful observations recalled for me Baker's (1982) depiction of the "adolescent as theorist." This is a non-Piagetian idea which suggests looking at adolescent development in terms of practical theory. It is exemplified by Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory based on the notion that people develop their own logical concepts of how the social world functions. These concepts are founded on concrete experiences arrived at by comparison and classification of different people and acts. (Mercer, 1991) Joseph critically examines the dynamics of other families and in his own family tries to understand different points of view.

Whenever you're around other families it always seems nice. Everybody seems to get along and I guess there's some part of you that always wishes that my family was like that.

I try and put myself in the parent's shoes. . . . That helps me when I'm trying to rationalize things, when I'm trying to think in a different point of view. I try to get out of my way of thinking. Look at both ways.

From a Bowen (1978) perspective, scapegoating allows the parents to deflect anxiety away from the marital dyad. Joseph speaks of the difficulties in his parent's marriage.

My parent's relationship is not as good as it should be because they switched roles and there's a 15 year age difference. I think that's a big difference and they talk and they go out but you just sort of know it's not what it should be. Three years ago they were on the brink of divorce and that was a really tough time because my dad was going to go and live in France and he'd be gone. That was a tough time. I would have had to live with my mom and help her out. My dad is the one who keeps it going, keeps it all together.

Instead of the parents having conflict with one another, they unite in their concern for the child. The scapegoated child is often the glue that holds the family together. Bowen (1978) noted that the degree to which the acting out child absorbs the family anxiety is the degree to which other relationships and other people are protected from dysfunction.

Esther's Story: "Getting Your Back Up"

I have the most incredible adopted parents. I call them my adopted parents because I'm not like a foster kid to them. This isn't really like a foster home, this isn't at all like that. Five years ago Emma was my parent-teen worker with my mom. I've know these people for such a long time. They've helped me out majorily and bought me a lot of stuff. I have my own room which is the most important thing to me because I've never had it before. Like I can paint my room black if I wanted. I can do whatever I want to do to my own room. I've had so many different places. I've lived here for a year but before that, since I was eleven, I've lived in foster homes or group homes. I'm not actually going to school right now. I'm working at The Gap but I plan to register for grade eleven next week.

The first time I ran into difficulties with my family was when I was very, very young. It was when my parents were still together and we lived in Nanaimo. I was eight or nine. I asked my dad if I could take my little brother to the park and he said "no" so I asked my mom and she said "yes." I played one parent against the other. We went to the park and my little brother was riding a bike and he almost got hit by a car. My dad picked me up and carried me home by my . . . and when I got home my dad totally beat the . . . beat the whatever . . . in the back yard and the neighbours called social services. My dad told the cop that nothing was wrong. He was just disciplining. The neighbour's kid and I were best friends and they wrote us a letter and said that they didn't want their kid involved with me and my family. I guess they didn't want their daughter being prone to seeing things like that. She was my best friend and we weren't allowed to hang out. And my dad got really mad

because I played one parent against the other. According to him I did this a lot when I was younger but now I realize that lots of kids do that. My adopted parents, Pete and Emma, made me realize that my parents are the ones with the problem and they're missing out on my wonderful life. They made me realize that lots of kids do this all the time. I was eight years old. I just wanted to go to the park. I've had tons of problems. This is just the first beginning of one problem.

There were lots of times I thought I did stuff that was wrong. Like I spilt my milk at the dinner table and my dad took the plate and hit the plate over my head, picked me up, smacked me, pulled my hair, and threw me in my room. Just little things like that and I remember those things so clearly. My dad won't remember but I remember them so clearly. Those are just some of the things.

My parents got a divorce when my mother left me and my dad. My dad drank a lot. He tried to kill my mom right in front of me and my brother. He was totally abusive but I don't think he ever realized it. The divorce dragged on for about three years but in the meantime my mom finally came and got me. I have a lot of anger about her leaving me with my dad. My mom and I have had a lot of problems. She kicked me out at the beginning of grade seven, when I was eleven. That's when I started living in foster homes. She was going through a lot of stuff herself because of the abuse with my dad. I went through so many foster homes. Maybe not as many as other people but I did go through a lot. I'm so different from other kids in foster homes. So many of them are into hanging out downtown, selling drugs, prostitution. I was so opposite to that. I never wanted that. My parents thought that putting me in these places would help me smarten up. They didn't realize all the

paths kids in my situation were taking. I just wanted so much more for myself. I wanted to be the best dresser, and the best . . . I always wanted to make it look like I had lots of support in my life. When people know that you're in foster homes and group homes they see you as really low - scum. Foster is a really big word to me. I hate that word. That words got me in so much trouble. Teachers, principals, other kids parents, everybody has a real thing about it. A lot of parents wouldn't let their kids hang out with me because I was in foster care or in a group home.

Before coming to live with Pete and Emma, I lived in a lot of different places. I didn't come to live with them when I first knew them because they weren't ready to take another teenager into their life - it's a lot to take on - so when I was fourteen I found out I had an aunt in Toronto and I got sent to live with her. (pause) This is the longest story you'll ever hear in your entire life. My aunt is exactly like my dad and they hate each other. My dad hates every women in his life, he's a full women hater. I lived a totally different life with my aunt. She's got ton and tons of money so we went shopping every day. It was totally cool but I got sent back. We went to a Kareoke bar and I met this guy who is twenty-one and I was fourteen. He was totally hot. I kind of sneaked on the phone with him and she found out and she's like, "I can't handle this" and she sent me back in an hour. So I move to Comox with my dad who I hadn't seen for a couple of years. He's angry that I went behind his back and moved in with his sister but he forgave me. And here I'm in Comox the smallest place in the world and I'm a full city girl with all these country people and I go through all these social problems. I'm living with my dad and my dad is very anal. You mess his house up, you get yelled

at and your room always has to be perfect, the towels have to be perfect. You get make-up on the towels, you get slapped on the head. It was totally bad.

My dad scared me, but he doesn't scare me any more. I wanted to stay with him but one day we had a huge fight and I turned around and said "f off," just f off. You're so Goddamn stupid, always putting me down." He totally started going off on me, picked me up and threw me in the back of the car and took me to this group home. This group home is the harshest place I've ever been to in my life. I had no privileges to change the channel on the T.V. I had no privileges. I had eating times. The doors were always locked. It was totally like jail. It was like jail and it got worse. It got so much worse because I didn't want to be there so I phoned my best friends. There was the cool group and the not cool group, the skid girls and the prep girls, and I called the prep girls who all came from rich families. "Like we can't really help you. We can't have you over to our house." They all got on the phone and they were all laughing and they hung up on me. My whole social life went kaboom. Everyone says, "Oh my god she's crazy, she's completely messed up." So many people didn't talk to me anymore. And it got worse.

One night when I came back to the group home they said you're stoned, cause I smoke pot, like I smoke pot it's the only drug I do. I'm not afraid to say it. I got into this argument and they confined me to my room. I said, "Can I have some water?" and they dumped it over my head. I sprayed one of them with a bottle of hair spray. Then they all held me down and all the other girls who lived there were watching while those assholes are holding me down, one sitting on my stomach, one holding my arms down, one sitting on my legs. This was the hardest thing in my life. They phoned the police and all three of them charged me with assault. I told the cop, "You've

got to get me out of here." The worker said to the cop I had a reputation for being suicidal. "Like what! I'm not suicidal!" This is the scariest thing in my entire life. I phoned my social worker. She was a dumb idiot. She was the worst social worker I ever had in my entire life. I hope she gets fired for everything she did to me. She didn't even listen to me, never listened to me. Always made me feel like shit. Never called me back. She was a major problem in my life, a major problem. They were all covering their fucking ass like everyone is covering their ass. No one is believing me and all my friends think I'm a psycho. So this is hell. But it got worse, so much worse.

I went back to the group home and there was this other girl and she was so bad news, so bad news. She beats up this girl that is living there and I shut the door while she beats her up. We got arrested and we were in jail for three days and I've never been in trouble in my entire life. I've never been thrown in jail. They took my tights, they cut my rings, they took away everything, everything. When we went to court, because I was the oldest, the judge thought it was all my fault. I was just bawling in court. They thought it was all me, so I got charged with pretty much everything. The first minute I get back to the group home I get in an argument with one of the workers. He said, "Why do you think you're here? Because you have problems! You have problems and we're here to help you with your problems." "Like I'm not the one with the goddamn problems. You are. Like I don't have problems. My parents are the ones with the problems." He started holding me down in the chair and I'm totally fighting back. They wrote all this down like it was my fault and charged me again. I ran away and lived in a tent until court happened.

So then I moved back with my mom. The whole court thing lasted a year. I breached all my probation, community hours, everything 'cause I didn't do anything. A year later everything pretty much got dropped. The guy that did everything to me didn't even show up. The lady showed up and the judge told her by law they're not allowed to do that to me. Like where do they get these damn people from? These people don't know how to do anything.

It didn't work out with my mom again. My mom blamed me a lot. She blamed her divorce from my father on me. It's not my fault that I was born. For what my mom has done to me I should never talk to her again. I should hate my mother. Everyone doesn't understand why I don't hate her for what she did to me. Like on my birthday, on Christmas she's kicked me out says, "I wish this day never happened, I wish you were never born." My mom has said everything mean. "You're a slut, you're going to amount to nothing, you're going to be a little hooker." My mom has just totally, utterly put me down saying things like "Your stupid, you're just so stupid." Back in the days my mom did need me. When my dad beat her up and threw her down the stairs she would come to my room. My mom did need me at one point and then she hated me. Maybe it's because she was jealous. I don't know.

My mom's very selfish. She so independent. I learned it all from her about being independent. It's just herself, herself, herself, selfish, selfish, selfish. Most people put their kids first. My mom would puts herself first. She's messed. The lady's messed up. I hope she dies soon. She always calls me and says she's really sick. I don't care. You know if my mom died I'd be better able to handle everything. Her being alive makes it a lot more difficult just 'cause I know she's out there. Sure it still really hurts me a lot. Actually she is practically dead to me. When is the last time I saw her? Holy, a long

time, a year and a couple of months ago. My mom moved away from here and she told me the week before. "Oh yeah, I'm moving away." I just freaked out. "Do you know the places you've put me in. You don't even know my life. You don't even know what you've done to me. You've screwed up my life big time, just big time." I can't ever forgive her for that. "I never did anything wrong. You were the one that did it all. I was a normal teenager and you don't know what a normal teenager is." She's done so many things wrong and so many things that I'm going to carry for the rest of my life. She doesn't want any part of my life, no part of it. I don't really want my mom to be a part of her grandchildren's life but I don't know I'll probably give in and allow her. I don't know, I might change my mind later.

The most important thing for me would be for my mom to say, "Let's just go shopping together or do you want to go to the Dairy Queen?" I don't understand my mother. I've always tried to reach out to her and I'd love to have her reach out to me. When I tried to commit suicide I wanted my mom to realize, "Look what your doing to me, I love you. I want to come home. I want to work out things." But she just hung up. She said, "You're crazy," and hung up the phone. It sucks that parents can get away with stuff like that because they're your biological parents. If my mother offered a relationship and came by and called I'd probably take it because she's my mother, just because she's my biological mother. My mother's gotten away with all of it. She still gets away with it. It really pisses me off.

I've never understood why all my friends never wanted to be with their family. It was so important for me to be able to say, "Yeah I live at home." I always wanted a family, I wanted this perfect family. Kids at my age don't usually want a family. I guess I wanted one because I never had one. My

parents pretty much took my childhood away from me. All I remember is bad stuff. So many bad things happened that I can't remember any good things. I did act out. Kids do act out. Everybody goes through that and what my parents didn't realize is that was normal and they thought, "My daughter's acting out, my daughter's sneaking out of the house, oh my God she's a problem, she's abnormal," and they didn't realize that was just life. I think my father realizes that a bit more now. I forgive my father, not a hundred percent, but a lot more than my mother just because my father calls me and tells me how he's doing. We're starting to have a relationship. My father tells me he's proud of me. My mom never says anything like that. My mom never calls me. I have to call her 'cause she doesn't want to spend the money. She's just royally screwed up and I don't care because she's the one who's missing out. When I'm older I'll phone her and say, "Yeah mom I just had a kid" but she won't be any part of it

I use to feel that I was the problem and I'd feel really hurt. I'd think it was my fault that all this has happened. Like it's bad enough that they'd say you're the problem here, but they also added on so many things to my pile of stuff. Your parents can just throw you away and say you're a problem. Like your parents won't take any responsibility, responsibility for their actions. It makes you very, very angry and you get really, really hurt. You get so used to being put down by everyone around you. I hated myself, I hated myself! I always thought that there was something wrong with me because my mom didn't love me, didn't want to see me.

A lot of what got me into trouble was "I'm so independent." Like always wanting to do everything by myself, to be such an independent kid. My parents said that's what got me in the most trouble, being independent. But

really that so stupid for them to say because that's not a problem that's a good thing. That's where it goes back to them. I'm not the problem. They're the problem. Being independent is a positive thing.

I'm not really interested in my family and where I stand anymore. I don't really care, to tell you the truth. I don't need to care because I look out for me, not them. They're suppose to look out for themselves. I may have felt once I was the family problem but I'm not because my parents are the ones that are the adults and they're the ones that are the problem. I've bettered myself and the way I've bettered myself is that I don't put myself down by saying I'm the family problem. I'm just me and I'm doing everything for me. I didn't grow up with my parents. I maybe had a small childhood with them but every since, between then and now, I've grown up by myself. I'm a strong person, and a talkative person and I'm not a problem. I don't think being thought of as a difficulty in my family has affected the way I think about myself. In a way I'm glad that I didn't have everything handed to me on a silver platter 'casue I wouldn't be the same person I'm today. I wouldn't be a person who knows about life. If life could be the way I wanted it to be I wouldn't have a family. They would all be dead and I would inherit all the money and I'd just live on my own. Man it would be so much easier.

Resistance

Esther began the second interview reluctantly. On two previous occasions when I arrived at her home for our scheduled interview, she was not there or on her way out. On this particular day, I was sent down to her room where I found her in darkness curled up in a blanket on the couch. She allowed me to open the blinds and begrudgingly sat up to do the interview, saying many times how tired she was. According to her foster mother, she had been upset with the focus of the last interview so I began by addressing her concerns. The problem, it seemed, was that I asked the wrong questions.

You shouldn't word it like being a difficulty because usually when you say that to a kid they fully freak out. They have their back up right away when you say you're a difficulty. You have to watch your words a lot with people cause they feel "Oh, I'm the difficulty." Well no, I'm not the problem, My parents are the problem.

Because of my conversation with Esther's foster mom, I was prepared for her objections to my line of questioning. I thought perhaps I had not explained my position thoroughly and all that was required was to clarify a systems perspective which views a child designated as a difficulty as the family's way of expressing anxiety. I had several books I was willing to lend her and a carefully thought out way of explaining my position. Before launching into my defense, I acknowledged her concerns and my appreciation for her responses to last week's questions. She assured me she had not objected to my questions; it was other kids I interviewed who might have a

problem. She wasn't really interested in my explanation, my books or, for that matter

my family or where I stand. I just want to do well for myself. I've never been the family problem. I may have felt that but my parents are the ones that are the adults and they're the ones that are the problem. It's been totally shown from today and back- like totally shown - that they are the ones with the problems.

We were at an impasse. Before participants consented to be in the study, I explained my position and formally asked them the question: "As I understand it, at various times in your life your family has thought of you as a difficulty. Would you agree?" She had agreed and her life experience supported the fact that her family did indeed consider her "the problem." I wasn't saying that she was the family problem just that her family has considered her to be a problem. She could not hear the distinction. That night I wrote in my journal

The more defended she became the more tense and hopeless I felt. What was I to do? Should I give up and go home? Should I try to explain it one more time? As I asked myself these questions, I realized almost simultaneously that I was "caught." It was Esther's job to answer the questions as she saw fit. It was my job to listen and pay attention to what was happening. Internally, I dropped my defense.

According to Bowen (1978), we are "caught" when we react or are "triggered" by something a client says or does. No one is exempt from being caught. What is needed is to recognize what is happening and to bring one's attention back to the client's concerns. The therapist makes note of the

triggering event and later examines what was happening for her at the time. My reaction to Esther's resistance came from the anxiety I was feeling about the progress I was making on my thesis. My anxiety was interfering with her process. I responded to her statements awkwardly but authentically.

Ok, right. So really that's perfect. That's really important information because I'm looking at what it's like to be thought of as a difficulty and you have become so clear that it isn't you. Although at one time you thought it was you, now you know it was your parents.

I relaxed and shared with her some of my experiences of growing up in family and said that I thought what had caused me the most difficulty was my "outspokenness." I asked her if she could think of anything that caused her trouble. She said it was her "independence." During the remainder of the interview she was at times defensive but was willing to engage with me and with the research topic. When we were finished, she said, "Thank you very much. I'm sorry I've been such a problem." She had spent the better part of two hours denying that she was a difficulty or had problems and was now acknowledging the difficulty she had caused me. She did not specify the nature of the difficulty but left me to assume it was the appointments she had missed and her opposition to my questions. The double message - I'm a problem, I'm not a problem - was implicitly present throughout both interviews. She would take a strong defensive stance and then slip in a short ambiguous statement that hinted at some part she played in a problem.

Esther's defensive position precludes flexibility. As a young child she thought it was all her fault; now she knows it was all her parent's fault. She is unable to expand her system from rigid dichotomous thinking to dialectical

thinking that is more inclusive and accepting of differences and ambiguity. Bowen (1978), along with others (Freud, 1966; Mahoney, 1991; Kelly, 1955; Goleman, 1985) explain this either/or stance as a reaction to a threat. When people feel threatened their anxiety increases. Anxiety is defined as: "The response of an organism to a threat, real or imagined. It is assumed to be a process that, in some form, is present in all living things" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 112). There are two types of anxiety, acute and chronic. Acute anxiety is a response to a real threat and is short-lived where chronic anxiety is a response to an imagined threat and is not limited to a period of time. Both are fed by fear. How a person becomes chronically anxious is a learned process to which many factors contribute. Once a crisis triggers acute anxiety, this anxiety becomes chronic because of a disturbance in the relationship system. As a person's anxiety goes up, the level of functioning goes down. The lens through which life is viewed becomes narrow and options for dealing with obstacles are restricted. In an attempt to get rid of anxiety, the anxious person often becomes focused on things or on others. It is apparent with Esther that her level of chronic anxiety is considerable. This prevents her from taking any responsibility for her present life situation. In an effort to reduce her anxiety she focuses only on what others have done to her.

Congruent with Bowen's theory is Goleman's (1985) notion of the "vital lie" which stands in place of a less comfortable truth. In Esther's case there are two lies. In the first instance is the lie that has evolved into a family myth which ascribes to Esther the role of family difficulty. The second is Esther's denial of her part in the family drama. Goleman describes denial as skewed attention which defines what we notice.

Attention is the gathering of information crucial to existence. Anxiety is the response when that information registers as a threat. . . . We can use our attention to deny threat, and so cushion ourselves from anxiety. In some ways that is useful self-deception. In others it is not. (p. 19)

The self-deception induced by the trade-off between attention and anxiety which begins as a way of shielding us from painful truths can become a habit that shapes character and constricts productive living. For Esther it has meant many living situations which end in conflict and rejection.

From a developmental perspective, her either/or thinking reflects Piaget's concrete operational stage which is usually associated with a younger person. Esther is almost nineteen and would, under normal circumstances, have moved into a formal operational stage which would permit more inclusive, logical thinking. But her circumstances were not normal and the state of chronic anxiety in which she exists prevents her from the type of reflective thinking which leads to a less extreme way of viewing the world. All my participants at different times in our interviews wavered between blaming themselves and blaming their parents, and although the onus for the problem was placed more squarely on the parents, all participants were willing to acknowledge some contribution to their troubles - except for Esther. Her parents, social worker, child care workers, and foster parents were the problem.

I'm not the one with the goddam problems, You are. Like I don't have problems. My parents are the ones with the problems.

I was treated in the most rudely way by people, by all the staff and the thing was I was the goodest one there. I didn't do anything.

There are a lot of things that I will never forgive my mom for because she's just royally skewed up. She skewed my life big time, just big time. I can't ever forgive her for that. I tell her still to this day I never did anything wrong. You were the one that did it all.

A contributing factor to Esther's high level of chronic anxiety is her feeling that she does not belong to anyone or any place. At the age of eight her parents separated and at eleven she went into foster care. Since then there have been many foster homes and several unsuccessful attempts to live with either her father or mother. These hopeful reunions with her parents have ended in explosive arguments and a return to the social care system.

Esther is not connected to an extended family who might offer her a sense of place on a larger scale. On her father's side there is only a sister in Toronto with whom Esther lived for a short period of time. But problems arose and the aunt sent her "back in an hour." There is no connection to the mother's family. Her mother, who is East Indian, is considered the black sheep because "she married white." The family has been told by Esther's mother that she is "really, really a bad kid." In addition to this "I'm the girl not the boy." She receives no birthday cards from the relatives and when she phones to speak with her mother, who now lives with the grandmother, the grandmother does not acknowledge her.

In part, my thoughts about Esther's place in family were stimulated by a piece I read in Charlene Spretnak's (1997) book, *Resurgence of the Real*. She speaks of the disastrous consequences that transpire when there is discontinuity between humans and their connection to a sense of place. Not only does Esther have no link to a physical or natural place, she has no place

in her family of origin or her extended family. Spretnak says that children who have been connected to somewhere

carry in their minds that sense of place, a place they came to know with a child's deep capacity for personal response. The presence of a place evoked their interiority and shaped their unfolding, offering over the years refuge and sustenance, stability and grace. (p. 27)

I can't help but wonder about the "disastrous consequences" that are a real possibility for Esther who has been denied the "embedding stories of family, clan and community" (p. 183). She describes what happens "to girls whose families' hate them" and who don't have a home.

They go and look for love in other places. That's how hookers get involved. They don't have love anywhere else so this is where they go to find their love. It's from their pimp. This is their family, this is their home and that's where they get into heroin and get into problems.

The exception to this story of not belonging, not having a place, is the one Esther tells about her present life. Her foster parents, she says, are really like adopted parents.

They are just the most wonderful people in the world and I owe everything to them. This isn't really like a foster home. This isn't at all like that. I've known these people for five years. Emma was my parent teen-worker with my mom. I've known them for such a long time and they're not foster parents.

The most important thing to me was having my own room which I've never had. Like I could paint my room black if I wanted. I can do whatever I want to do to my own room. I've had so many different places and so many different. . .

This text came from my first interview with Esther. The next time we met she indicated that things were not as ideal and her foster mother told me that real problems had arisen which would probably necessitate Esther leaving. This brings me to Esther's final comment reflecting her sense of belonging and place. The last question I asked all my participants is referred to as the miracle question (Berg, 1992). It asks them to describe what their life would be like if a miracle took place. Esther's first response was

I would have new parents. I would wake up and would have these two nice parents that walk into my room that aren't mine. They would walk in with a million dollars in their hand and say, "lets go shopping." There would be a Mercedes parked out in the driveway.

When I asked her, "What about your relationship with these new parents?" she said

It would be a wonderful relationship. It would be - I mean me and Peter and Emma (her foster parents) don't have the most wonderful relationship all the time but I don't know, I don't know . . . the miracle would be . . . I wouldn't have a family. They would all be dead and I would inherit all the money and just live on my own. That would be my miracle. Man it would be so much easier.

Once again it seems that sense of place is merely a mirage. Even her dream offers no sense of belonging, no sense of place. Ultimately she feels the work of relationship is too great; living on her own with lots of money offers the best alternative.

Noah's Story: "Feeling Like I Didn't Care"

I live at home with with my dad and my brother who's nineteen. I have an older sister but she lives on her own. I'm seventeen. The biggest thing in my life right now is that I have a kid and my girlfriend is pregnant again. I'm going to school and doing an autobody course but I need to get a job because I'm always asking my dad for money to help my son out and stuff.

There's been hundreds of times that I've gotten in trouble with my family. When I got kicked out of school it started a lot of fights between me and my dad because he felt like I wasn't doing anything. It wasn't my fault. It was between me and the teacher. School is really important to my dad because he's a doctor and really successful. He was upset because I wasn't living up to his expectations.

Another time I got in trouble was when I was smoking pot out in the backyard with a few of my friends and my dad came home and saw us doing it. I guess most parents would get mad at you for doing drugs. He would always try and ground me but I wouldn't really listen to him because one day I just thought well if I don't stay in my room what can he do. He's just going to keep telling me to go in my room so I'll leave. What can he do then? He can't physically hold me down. I know I could beat him. I would. Eventually he stopped with groundings. He did yell at me about stuff and say I shouldn't do it. Okay, whatever. This is my life. I can do what I want with it.

I got in trouble with the police and that ended up being more problems. I was on acid and I was walking around and I got picked up and taken down to the station. My dad didn't really want to get me out but he did. It started a big

fight. "Like what are you doing getting picked up by the police? You're going to end up dead." Bla, bla, bla. I guess he was worried but I just saw it as him getting mad at me. I never really saw it as him being worried. I'd see him yelling and I wouldn't hear what he was saying. I wouldn't look past that to the words -the meaning behind the words. All I could see was anger so I'd say forget it. I don't need this. I'd go and sit down in my room or leave. I just felt that I didn't care.

I think a lot of it was that when me and my brother would get into fights my dad would get on his side and they would both fight with me. A lot of times I thought of it as everyone ganging up on me because no matter what would happen I would be wrong. Things would go missing and I wouldn't do it and I'd get blamed for it and occasionally I'd get blamed so much that I'd just do it. Doing that helped with the way I ended up. I came to believe it just didn't matter. I explain it to myself that I didn't care anymore. Once when I was eleven my Super Nintendo went missing and my parents accused me of pawning it. "If you want to accuse me accuse me. If you don't, don't. If you're going to accuse me I can't change your mind. Obviously you think I'm guilty." There was nothing I could do about it.

I've definitely got in more trouble than anyone else in the family. I figure I've had more difficulty with life in general. I've been through a lot more and I've seen a lot more. My brother and sister may know more about books and stuff but I know more about the streets, about how to survive if you get caught in the forest or something. In a lot of ways they've had it easy 'cause they always lived at home. My brothers never got kicked out or lived on the street. It's not easy to live on the street. I've stayed at the Kiwanis youth shelter. I hate that place. The beds are like cardboard.

The main problem I'm having right now is the stress level with me and the person I'm having the baby with. It's really stressful having a kid and another one on the way especially when that somebody was already pretty crazy beforehand. She's very temperamental. There are a lot of things I have to do to look after a kid and deal with her - her sometimes saying that he's not my son, using him as a pawn. I don't feel it's right of her to do that.

And there's school. It's always been school and now the community hours I have to do as well. I have until January 25 to do seventy hours and I've only done three. I've told my dad I've done more just because I've been trying to make him not get mad. Yeah I've got a lot on my plate and I'm having troubles dealing with it all. I have to look after my son. I have to go to school. I have to go run around to get stuff for Alison and so on and so on.

It always works the same for me. I get in trouble, I get mad and I don't care. It's a bad mixture. When I get mad I just don't care. I've got a real bad temper. I can control it a bit better now but if I lose it it's still really bad. I use to kick holes in the walls and broke a couple of doors and broke all my tables and chairs and stuff like that. When I'm angry I'll start a fight. I'll make sure me and someone get into it so that I can release my stress. I'll be all bottled up and then I'll explode and then it will happen. I don't even do it purposely. It'll just happen. Lately, I've only been getting in a bit of trouble - a little bickering, just little disagreements but no big trouble. I consider it big trouble when I get pulled down by the cops or when I actually lose it. For me now it's just trying to stay calm, so I don't find myself losing it as much. When I was young my dad tried to totally control me and then once I got bigger and starting losing it - like I felt I was going crazy at one point in my life - he would back down. One time he kicked me in the stomach but I cracked his

ribs and gave him stitches. My brother tried to stop me too and I cut open his back with the corner of the table in the kitchen. They both weren't able to stop me so that made them nervous. My dad or my brother used to be able to hold me down but now they couldn't so I think that scared them. Now that I'm trying to control my temper my dad's more in my face because he thinks I'm backing down and that makes it even harder for me. He knows he can push it a bit more but I try to not let it bother me. He is my father so I try to listen to him.

It's different for me now that I have a kid. I want my kid to listen to me and not have as much trouble as I've had. Since I've started hanging around with my own family I've actually been able to talk to my parents more because that changed me a lot. I used to be really, really bad. I didn't care about nothing. I did a lot of bad things. Now I've sort of mellowed out. I've stopped doing acid. I used to do it every day for a couple of years. I realized I can't do acid and have a kid. I won't be able to think because it makes your brain bleed and it can make blood clots and then you can have flash backs.

Having a baby brought me back to school. I didn't think about school until the baby. If I don't do school then I won't be anywhere. I could live by myself without finishing school. Like I could make it by myself but with a kid I couldn't expect for a living off the government. Having a kid definitely turned me in a new direction. I realized I couldn't do drugs, I couldn't do crime and I couldn't do what ever else. I had to give my kid a good example. I don't want him to end up like me.

Five years from now things will be better. My dad and I will probably talk more. We'll actually say what's going on in each others life instead of you do your thing and I'll do my thing. Everyone will be happy and not yelling. If

he's down on me about some concern he wouldn't be getting angry and yelling. He'd treat me like one of his employees - like calmly. I'm a grown person. I may not be fully grown but I have a mind and I know what I'm doing. I'll be working too. I'll probably be an autobody repairman but I might work on planes or boats as well. I can branch off and I'm also going to go to college to get a welding certificate. I doubt I'll own a shop but I'll probably be going somewhere in life. That's what I'm hoping for anyway.

Hopelessness

I struggled with giving Noah's story a name. Unlike the other participants, he offered no fitting metaphor to describe the predominant theme of his narrative. I thought about calling it not caring and then caring, but it seemed awkward so I settled on a phrase he used many times "feeling like I didn't care." Noah had no trouble describing himself as a difficulty. At the beginning of the interview he gave me an example of getting into trouble with his family and I asked if there were other times he could tell me about. He replied "There have been hundreds." Even if the number is inaccurate, Noah's perception of how many times he has been in trouble with his family is enormous. Before he can remember there are pictures of him with black eyes because of trouble he's gotten into. "Not caring" became his way of managing the difficulty he continuously found himself in.

He (father) would always try and ground me but one day I just thought "If I don't stay in my room what else can he do? He's just going to keep telling me to go in my room so I'll just leave. What can he do then? I just felt that I didn't care.

I never saw it as him being worried about me. I just thought he's going to get mad at me so whatever. Forget it. I don't need this. Just go sit down in my room, leave. Whatever.

Me and my brother would get in fights and my dad would get on his side and they would both fight with me so a lot of times I thought of it as everyone ganging up on me because no matter what would happen I would be wrong. So just hearing that enough helped me believe it doesn't matter. I just explained it that I didn't care anymore.

From Noah's perspective there was no hope, no possibility that he could change how his family viewed him. At a very young age he stopped fighting his family's perception of him and accepted it.

In the early stages of development, children take their parent's representations of them as if they are real. Children need to be cared for by their parents or they will not survive either physically or emotionally. It is therefore not surprising that they do not dispute the parent's vision. Watzlawich, Bevelas, & Jackson (1967) provide an example of the double bind in which the child finds himself.

The child was faced with the dilemma of whether to believe the parent or his own senses. If he believed his own senses he maintained a firm grasp on reality. If he believed the parent, he maintained the needed relationship, but distorted his perception of reality. (p. 15)

The egocentricity of young children permits parental projections to be taken up by them with little or no resistance. It is beyond their capabilities to put themselves in another's shoes and imagine that a parent's hopes and fears could shape how they are viewed. Children are often seen as extensions of their parents and as such are repositories of their dreams and desires (Block, 1994; Freud, 1966).

Although Noah accepted the role into which he was scripted, he regained some control by "not caring." He could not make his family see him differently but by "not caring" about them he could diminish the pain he experienced. "Not caring" extended to other relationships and to his life in general. The price to be paid was a kind of numbness. "I didn't care about

nothing. I did a lot of bad things." By doing "a lot of bad things" Noah contributed to and reinforced his role as a difficulty in family.

At this point in time, he has moved from this position to a more caring place, but vestiges of his former identity remain. In times of stress he retreats to a "non-caring" stance. My experience with him, in a small way, mirrored his way of managing in the world. He was polite and co-operative in the two interviews we had together but from the beginning gave me the very clear message that he was answering my questions because he wanted to.

Basically I hate counselling. No offense. I went to the Family Violence Project, to phase 1 of it. It was alright but mostly counselling I just don't like. I don't know something about it. I find it hard to know why people want to get inside your head. I guess this is sort of like that but I'm willing to do it.

Near the beginning of our second interview the microphone stopped working and I was left with a blank tape. I phoned and asked if we could meet again as having his story was extremely important to me. He agreed. The next two appointments he canceled and the following two he didn't show up. Aware of his feelings about counselling and my need to get this interview completed, I remained calm and accepting of these transgressions. The last time I spoke with him he said he'd forgotten about the appointment and that because of all his commitments it would be a very long time before we could meet again, perhaps months. I wrote in my research journal

At least I didn't cry on the phone. I feel so discouraged. Each time I talked to him after he missed an appointment he apologized and promised to be there the next time. I did not dwell on his reasons for missing the

appointments or even ask for an explanation. I quickly moved to when we could meet next. Why has it become so difficult for him to keep an appointment? His brother said he didn't even go to school today. What do people feel like who work with kids who are having problems and time and again the kids lets them down? Is this the reason social workers become jaded and stop caring? Noah and I had developed a good relationship. I couldn't believe he didn't care more about the jam I was in.

I thought about the parallel process that clients recreate in the counselling relationship.

Clients are highly skilled in manipulating others so that history will repeat itself. It's not that they do it "on purpose;" rather, these, self-defeating social maneuvers are literally the only way they know how to interact with people who stand in the role of significant others from the past. (Moursund, 1993, p. 71)

On an unconscious level, Noah was acting in the same "non-caring" way he used to manage his relationship with his family and with the world at large. In his "not caring" for my situation I felt less caring for him. I began to have some understanding of how not caring becomes a way of protecting oneself against further disappointment and pain. It also reminded me of the back and forth movement that occurs when a person attempts to shed one identity and take up another (Carlsen, 1988; Mahoney, 1991).

The shift for Noah, occurred when his girlfriend became pregnant.

Actually when she got pregnant was when I started changing things. That's when I first went back to school. Like she quit. Like she did acid before she got pregnant not as much as I did but she did it occasionally.

She quit smoking. She quit drinking and I was around her and she was all straight and her and the baby both did it.

Such life changing events have been described and discussed by numerous writers. Denzin (1992) refers to such transformations as epiphanies.

Epiphanic experiences rupture routines and lives and provoke radical re-definitions of self. In moments of epiphany, people redefine themselves. Epiphanies are connected to turnin-point experiences.
(p. 27)

McAdams (1993) describes these experiences as nuclear episodes. "Nuclear episodes may include, but are not limited to, high points, low points, and turning points in our narrative accounts of the past" (p. 296). They may serve as narrative proof to substantiate what we already believe about ourselves, or, as in Noah's case, symbolize personal change or transformation. Noah sees this event as a second chance - an opportunity to do it right. He doesn't want his child to have the same kind of life he has had. Now when his dad gets "in his face" he tries to get a grip on his anger and listen to what he has to say.

I try not to let it bother me. He is my father so I try to listen to him. I want my kid to listen to me - not have as much trouble as I had.

Noah has made a significant move from "not caring" to caring once again. He harbors the same dream as many adolescent girls who have come from troubled upbringings and have a baby. They hope to give and to get the love they did not receive in their own childhood and to be better parents than their own parents were to them (Kegan, 1982; Mercer, 1991). This baby has

given Noah hope. "It's definitely turned me in a new direction." Instead of adding "getting his girl friend pregnant" as another "screw up" in his life he has taken her pregnancy as an opportunity to change his identity in family. He is working hard at putting aside his former role as a difficulty and becoming responsible.

I stopped doing acid because I realized I can't do this and have a kid. I won't be able to think cause it makes your brain bleed. I couldn't do drugs. I couldn't do crime, and I couldn't do whatever else. I had to give my kid a good example because I don't want him to grow up like me. He's what brought me back to going to school in the first place. I didn't think about school until the baby. If I don't do school then I won't be anywhere. I could live by myself without finishing school. I could make it but with a kid I couldn't except for living off the government.

It is clear that Noah is putting himself in the vulnerable position of caring, a position he has eschewed for many years. Ostensibly, his hope is that his child will have a better life than he has had, but also present is the hope that, from this time on, his life will be better. Nodding (1984) offers a description of what happens when a person cares: "My vulnerability is potentially increased when I care, for I can be hurt through the other as well as through myself. But my strength and hope are also increased . . ." (p. 33).

From a Bowen family systems view, Noah's reactions to his girlfriend's pregnancy is one of several predictable responses. "People have three movement options in a relationship: They can move toward the other person, they can move away, or they can stand still" (Guerin, Fogarty, Fay & Kautto, 1996, p. 8). Noah has chosen to move towards his girlfriend and become involved with the baby. To understand Noah's response it is

important to place him in the context of his family situation. He is the youngest of three children. When he was eleven years old, his mother moved out of the family home leaving the children in the care of the father. The mother lived near by and participated in a peripheral way in the children's up bringing.

One of the ways this family manages their anxiety is through distancing. In this family, when the situation became intolerable, the mother moved out and, soon after, divorced her husband. Divorce can be thought of as an extreme form of distancing. Temporary relief from conflict ensues but the divorce does nothing to resolve the originating emotional issues. These issues will rear their ugly heads time and again in new relationships. When there is cut-off from the family of origin, which was the situation for Noah's mother, the cards are already stacked against the marriage. Her own mother will not speak with her and the father, on his death bed, refused any contact. She has not seen her brother since he left home at sixteen. When there is no connection with the family of origin the anxiety from unresolved issues that need to be worked on with the original family are brought into the new relationship. This puts an enormous amount of pressure on a marriage. If the couple are unable to work on the hard emotional issues that arise, other ways are found to manage the anxiety. In this family, in conjunction with distancing and cut off, child-focus became another mechanism for regulating anxiety. Noah was the child who received the brunt of the focus.

Many factors come into play in deciding who will be the focused-on child. Children are ready made targets for expressing anxiety since they are the most vulnerable and have the least power in the family. Noah is naturally shy and not particularly verbal. He has always experienced difficulty in school and

has been diagnosed with learning disabilities. School difficulties alone often promote parental focus and as he mentioned a number of times, school was very important to his father.

It is not surprising that Noah uses distancing as a way of handling anxiety since this is the way anxiety is managed in his family. As a child he could not leave his family physically, but by not caring he could emotionally distance himself. If he had been older, he may have moved to another city and completely cut off from his family the way his mother's family had done. His not caring paired with getting angry led him into a whole range of delinquent activities and furthered his childhood image as a difficulty. Noah explained the sequence of events in the following way: "I got in trouble, I got mad and I didn't care."

In accordance with Bowen's (1978) view, Noah's shift from "not caring" to "caring" is a reactive position precipitated by a significant life event. It appears to be an emotional reaction not the result of a well thought out plan based on principle. To be able to maintain his position of caring he needs to have developed more of a sense of self, a self that is not dependent on the ebb and flow of circumstances. He is only seventeen and still living at home with his father, so thinking in terms of differentiation, he has a long way to go in creating a self apart that would be able to handle the demands of caring for a baby. When his attempts to show care are challenged, as they surely will be, his previous way of dealing with anxiety - emotionally distancing - will quite possibly reassert itself. At the present time he has the best of intentions, but intentions are seldom enough to bring about lasting change. What is needed is a solid sense of self that can within stand the anxiety that is an integral part of being a parent. There is always present, even in situations where parents

are more mature, the possibility that the requirements of a baby will exceed the resources of the caretakers. Nodding (1984) claims

There exists in all caring situations the risk that the one caring will be overwhelmed by the responsibilities and duties of the task and that, as a result of being burdened, he or she will cease to care for the other and become instead the object of "caring." (p. 12)

Mercer (1991) supports this analysis from a developmental perspective by noting the mis-match of needs and abilities between adolescents and their babies.

The relationship of adolescent parents with their children are often examples of the problems adolescents have in understanding other people. The egocentrism of adolescence interferes with empathy and with the capacity to face reality. Infants and toddlers, as we saw earlier, need care and realistic treatment. When adolescents are parents, individuals who need much care and understanding are paired with individuals who are capable of providing very little. (p. 518)

This rather bleak picture is not without hope. Life's circumstances can either assist or hamper one's journey (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Movement towards maturation can be brought about by both stressful and pleasant events in life. Although stress is often thought to hold back development, it may allow the person to experience himself as competent and to integrate that sense into his identity. If the individual is not overwhelmed, more assertive stances may follow the adjustment to stress (Stewart, Sokol, Healy & Chesler, 1996). Noah is not on his own. His father and mother are supportive of him as he moves towards a more responsible position in his

family of origin and in his new family. He will have setbacks but his resolve to be different and his willingness to try on a new identity with the necessary support and some luck can make a difference.

Moses's Story: "Holding My Hand"

My mom and dad got a divorce when I was two or three. My dad lives in Sidney and he's behind me but he's just a lot different from me. I don't really see him that often. My grandpa is more like a dad to me. He totally supports me. I live with my mom and her boyfriend. I get along with him because he never tells me what to do. When my mom and I argue he just goes upstairs and watches T.V. When I'm doing something I know I probably shouldn't, he doesn't say "don't do that." He just waits for my mom to come home and lets her deal with it. Even if my mom doesn't find out, he doesn't rat on me. On the weekends, I work at Zellers and last January, I started school at Camosun.

I've mostly had trouble with my mom. She used to go out with this guy. He was a nice guy and then he went away on a trip and when he came back he was a total jerk. He would tell me I couldn't do things and try to put me in my place and I wouldn't take it so my mom would give me shit for it. I felt like I was doing something wrong but I knew I wasn't because he didn't have a right to say anything. He would bitch to her and eventually it got to the point where I wouldn't come home. I usually stayed with my grandparents. It was me and my grandpa against my mom and I was right in the middle.

I don't really think my mom is on my side. She's my mom and I love her but she not on my side. Like for example, she'll never cook except for when her boyfriend Bill is there. I've accepted that. It's just the way it is so I'm not going to argue about it. She's really calm around him but I know she's got a really bad temper and whenever he's not around, she flips out on me. One day I started the car because I was going to pick up my friend and she came

outside and started yelling that I was making too much noise and then she just forgot about it the next day. She always yells at me kind of mysteriously. It's weird. Partly it's because when Bill's around she trying to give him the image that she's some kind of a calm person because he's very calm and she's not. I know that she just kept it inside for so long so I just let her be.

A couple of weeks ago I got beaten up by the police and my grandpa told me not to take it, make a complaint. My dad was the same but my mom said if you weren't lippy with them that wouldn't have happened. She didn't support me. But then maybe that's her way of reacting. I'm sure she was scared. If the police are doing that to me she must think, "What's going to happen next time?" She wants to believe that there's a reason why they did it or else she'd go nuts. Like I know she cares. She just doesn't know how to show it.

My mom goes through these stages where she'll let me do whatever I want and all of a sudden she starts cracking down on imaginary things - things that aren't a big deal that everybody does. Like one time she gave me a cab card so I wouldn't drive drunk. "If you drink just use the card. I won't ask you any questions. I'll just pay the bill." And then I used it and she got mad and wanted me to pay for half of it. I said, "It doesn't work like that. You can't do that." She doesn't think straight when she's on these little missions and later on she'll apologize. Sometimes she'll make me feel like I'm really bad for some reason. She just thinks I'm bad sometimes but I know I'm not because I know people that are bad and I'm not like them.

What my mom wants is for me to follow her blindly because she thinks she know what's best but I know she doesn't. Like at the beginning of the year I was going to do some electrical apprenticeship and then one day I just

decided no I don't like it and I quit. My mom got really really pissed off. I told her, "Look this is my life. It would have been a good job but I think I can do something else and I'm sorry if it offends you." And she got really mad again. I said, "I just want to go back to school." She didn't understand. She thought I wanted to sit around and do nothing. I'll get another job. I kept telling her to get off my back. I'll do it myself, get lost. She meant to help me but the only thing she was doing was stressing me out. She didn't want me to sit around and be lazy. I know where she's coming from but she just says all the wrong things. The worse thing you can say to a person is that you're going to turn out to be nothing - like mom, shut up. There are tons of jobs out there and I make more money now than I did then, so she obviously doesn't know what she's talking about. I knew it would work out but my mom just didn't have that kind of faith. She doesn't believe in me. I know she does in the back of her mind but she's just really scared. She's scared that I'll turn out like my uncle who sits around and does nothing. She wants me to walk easy and you don't get anywhere if you do that. I'll listen to what she has to say but if I don't like it I won't take it. She doesn't understand that I'm smart. She still thinks of me as the way I was. She doesn't realize that I control my own ship now, I know what I'm doing. I know where I'm going.

The biggest issue is her not realizing that I'm growing up. Sometimes I choose to do things that are a little unorthodox - like if I see an opportunity to make money I'll talk to my grandpa and he'll tell me how to cover my tracks because he knows I'm going to do it whether he says no or yes so he just makes sure I don't get in trouble. My mom will just say, "NO, NO, NO!" If I want to take that risk it's my choice. She can't hold my hand my whole life, come into my apartment when I'm older and look through it. And the other

thing she does is that every day - every day she comes five minutes before my alarm goes off to wake me up. I've set my alarm and I'm capable of waking myself up. I tell her, "Go away!" and she'll sit there and keep nagging. Even on her days off she'll wake up just to wake me up. She makes it her hobby. She just tries to hold my hand all the time like I'm still a baby. I hate it! I can't stand it!

What I've come to realize is that there's no real point in arguing with her. It's kind of pointless because she won't change. I don't really get anywhere. I've accepted that's just the way she is. I can take things the way they are just as long as I know what they're like. Then there's no excuse for me. I can choose to accept it or I can walk away. Now when she comes and wakes me up instead of yelling, "Go away!" I get up and then she'll leave and it just saves me. I know it's best just to leave it otherwise she'll still be bugging me after school.

What's really too bad is that we can't be open and discuss things. She's not honest about stuff. She'll snoop through my books and if she knows I'm doing bad in a class she'll ask me how I'm doing. And I'll say, "You obviously know. Why else would you ask about that specific subject? You've been snooping. Why don't you just say it." Or she'll tell my grandparents that I'm doing bad and they they'll start bitching at me too. I'll tell them, "Don't listen to my mom because I'll know where they got it from." My mom won't confront me, she'll just go and tell other people.

I don't talk to my mom very much. I don't really feel comfortable telling her things because I don't think she'll understand. I guess I don't really trust her. It's not that I think she'll tell other people but I don't feel that she deserves to know. She hasn't treated me fairly. Why should I tell her? She

hasn't done anything to earn that. When I want something changed she won't listen to me. It's my way of standing up to her. She always asks about the stuff that's happening in my life and I never tell her. I just say nothing.

I used to have a really big problem with anger but I can control it more now. I don't let it get the best of me. I've punched twenty holes in my wall. I would never hit my mom but I would turn around and smack a wall. It seems like I'm a mirror. When people treat me in a certain way I'll treat them just the same way back but worse or better. If they treat me nice I'll treat them much nicer.

When you're thought of as a difficulty in your family you just think you're difficult in general. It makes you feel like you're already bad so you might as well be bad. If you're already getting punished for something why not do it. If people treat me that way, think of me that way, who cares? It makes me more negative. In school I was already bad, already on the other side of the fence so what was the point of trying to get better if you're just going to be thought of as the same. The good stuff is missed. Only the bad things are noticed.

Having trouble in your family affects everything. When I'm not getting along with my mom I think about it all day. I get really mad and I can't do anything. I'll be sitting in class thinking about it or if I have a bad day at home I'll have a bad day at work. It's because when I go to work my attitude stinks so people aren't going to want to deal with me which makes me more mad when I come home. Even if I can forget about it at work for a bit when I'm at home there's nothing else. That's your world and there's nowhere to go. It's really important to try and not let people convince you you're bad

when you're not. It doesn't matter what they say. It's just their opinion. It's not necessarily reality.

I don't really know where I'd be without my grandpa. When my mom's boyfriend was trying to tell me what to do my grandpa said I didn't have to put up with it. "Just come here. I'll take care of it. Don't worry about it." My grandpa would argue for me all the time, against anything at all. No matter what, he always takes my side. I've never had a problem getting along with him. People say that he spoils me. Yeah he spoils me but it's not in a way that makes me not work for things. If I need something I'll ask him but I don't like to because I know he'll give it to me. He's like a dad to me. He's always looking out for me. He wants me to buy a condo so I'd have a place to live if there's a problem just in case he's not around.

Sometimes he gets stupid ideas and I just kind of go along with him. It's just that he's old and a bit out of time. Like, "Don't drink." I know that's the way it was where he's from and it's nothing personal so I just say okay and I don't tell him. When I crashed up his car he didn't say a word about it. I called him and said, "I bumped a fender," and he said, "Drive it over." And when I told him it had to be towed he didn't say anything. "I'm just glad that you're okay. The car can be fixed."

He doesn't judge me. I'll go over there at 2:00 in the morning and like "Grandpa I'm hungry." He'll cook me a steak or spaghetti. My grandpa never really gets mad. If there's a problem he just thinks about it and then tells me something smart. He's done everything for me. I'd go to school so I could have enough money to take care of him when he's old not because anyone made me but just for the things he's done for me. It's a given.

In a way I'm glad I've had difficulty in my family. It's made me really strong. I've dealt with a lot of things that most people haven't. Once something set me off and I had a nervous breakdown. I couldn't move. I was in pain. My body was stiff and it was contracted. I couldn't do anything and when you deal with such stress things don't really seem that bad sometimes. You just know you're going to get over it. So if I have a hard time with a girlfriend or something I know it's not a big deal. Things don't get out of proportion. I think it prepares you for the real world. If it doesn't kill it makes you stronger.

My mom does deserves a lot of credit. When we first got here we used to live on welfare not because my mom was lazy. She was working under the table but she just couldn't make ends meet. She was going to school too and she worked really hard and she got everything all together. She brought me up pretty much by herself and I'm sure I was a pain in the ass. I was always a confrontational type. Like when I was little I can remember I used to argue with my neighbours and stuff just to get a rise out of them for no particular reason.

If a miracle happened and I was no longer thought of as a difficulty I would know because my alarm would wake me up, not my mom. She wouldn't nag me and try and hold my hand. If I failed all my classes she would understand that I wasn't ready to go to college. It wasn't because I was lazy or a problem. She'd see the reasons I do certain things. She'd understand instead of trying to fix what I do. I'd be able to talk to her if I was having a problem with a girl and she wouldn't have to give her opinion. She'd just listen and she'd stand behind me even if she didn't like what I decided. You have to accept your kid no matter what. If he's a bad kid, he's a

bad kid. You can try and change him but if that doesn't work you still love him because he's your kid.

Independence

The major difficulty Moses experiences with his mother centers on the issue of independence. He uses the metaphor of having his hand held as a way to describe this relationship.

She tries to hold my hand all the time, like I'm still a baby. I hate it. I can't stand it. Like she always comes down to my room and it just bugs me.

Like if I want to take a risk it's my choice. She can't hold my hand my whole life, like come into my apartment when I'm older and look through it to see if anything is there.

As he sees it, his mother is unwilling to let him manage his life. If he were seen as a responsible person and not as a difficulty, he would be allowed to make significant decisions about things that concerned him, developmentally a task he is ready for at the age of eighteen. Erickson (1968) says that for the growth of autonomy a firmly developed early trust is necessary and that "a sense of trust is a reflection of parental faith" (p. 113). It is precisely this "sense of trust" that appears to be lacking in this relationship. Time and again, the mother gives Moses the message that she doesn't believe in him.

I quit my job before I had another one but I knew it would work out. I have really good luck with jobs. My mom didn't have that kind of faith. She doesn't believe in me. She just always wants me to walk easy. She figured I was quitting my electrician job because I didn't like to work. She

thought I was using it as an excuse 'cause I wanted to go out all the time and party. Even if I did so what. I just got out of high school.

Her lack of trust manifests itself in the form of interference. Every morning she wakes Moses up for school five minutes before his alarm goes off. Even on her days off she awakens early to get him up. Moses sarcastically says, "It's her hobby." This interference comes from a place of fear, fear that Moses won't be able to manage, will "screw up." Her fear is expressed in anxiety about the choices Moses makes. He explains his mother's interference by saying that she is "scared." She is "scared" that he won't get another job, won't do well at school, will get in serious trouble with the police, but mostly

She's just really scared that I'll turn out like my uncle, I think. Just sit around and get lazy.

Erickson (1968) says that this type of projection can find expression in a child who assumes a negative identity. "A negative identity is an identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, had been presented to them as most undesirable or dangerous and yet also as most real" (p. 174). This occurs when a parent responds selectively to certain undesirable traits in a child which point to a repetition of a negative pattern in another family member. The result of this negative focus, at times, seems to have more reality than the child's attempts at being good. Bowen (1978) refers to this process as the family projection process. We see what we want to see or are afraid to see. This reinforces the

very traits we wish to eliminate. The child responds to parental anxiety and participates in the process by doing what the parent fears. According to Moses

Even when I'm good it doesn't get noticed. It only gets noticed when I'm bad so it doesn't matter. People don't realize that if you treat people in that way they're going to say "Who cares?"

In school I would just think that I was already bad so what's the difference. I was already on the other side of the fence, so what's the point of trying to get better, do better if you're just going to be thought of as the same.

Thus the child fulfills the caricatured image as an inevitable outgrowth of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Block, 1994). Since Moses is an only child he is the only available person in whom his mother can lodge her projections. The advantage of having siblings is that the chances of one child being the sole bearer of the family projection process are lessened (Bank & Kahn, 1982).

Rather than interference which promotes dependency, Moses longs for support. Support is based on trust which comes from a belief in the other person's ability to do what needs to be done. It is a stepping back, allowing the child to attempt life on his own, bolstering his wish to "stand on his own two feet" but being on hand to offer assistance if requested. Support is walking beside a child, whereas interference is holding his hand because of the fear that, without you, he will fall. When I asked Moses what support from his mom would look like, his response was

She'd see the reasons why I do certain things. She'd understand it instead of trying to fix it. She wouldn't have to agree. She'd just have to accept it. Like if your kid's a bad kid then he's a bad kid. I still love him. He's still my kid.

If I failed all my classes she would understand that I wasn't ready to go to college. I'm young. It's not because I didn't want to or because I was lazy. It's just maybe I just wasn't ready for it. She wouldn't have to like it; I wouldn't expect her to. She wouldn't freak out and say, "I never saw you pick up at book" She always says that. It just bothers me because it makes me feel it's my laziness or something and that's not it.

For the constructing of a viable path toward adult maturity Marcia (as cited in Santrock, 1998) believes three essential aspects of adolescent development for identity formation are necessary. "Young adolescents must be confident that they have parental support, must have an established sense of industry, and must be able to adopt a self-reflective stance toward the future" (p. 325). Moses has shown his sense of industry by working and attending school and his ability to be self-reflective about the future in many of the responses he made to me in our interviews. The lack of support from his mother affects his struggle toward identity formation and independence.

It is important to note that both support and interference are ways of caring. Interference is driven by anxiety. Moses' mother is extremely anxious about her son's success and Moses is acutely aware of it. As much as he dislikes her interference and its effect on him, he believes it comes from a place of caring.

My mom deserves a lot of credit. Like we bought a house. When we first got here we used to live on welfare not because my mom was lazy. She just couldn't make ends meet. She worked really hard and she got everything all together. She brought me up pretty much by herself and I'm sure I was a pain in the ass to bring up. I was always a confrontational type.

She doesn't do anything to prevent us having a good relationship on purpose but she just treats me like a baby all the time.

Like I know she means well she just doesn't know how to do it.

I just look at it that she had a good intention so I just let it slide.

Knowing his mother cares but finding her interference untenable creates tension in Moses. On the one hand he tells me she's a "bitch" while on the other he defends her behaviour. He is often conflicted about what he "feels" and what he "knows."

My mom's boyfriend would tell me what I couldn't do and try and put me in my place and I wouldn't do it so my mom would give me shit for it. I felt I like was doing something wrong but I knew I wasn't because he didn't have a right to say anything.

When Moses criticizes his mother's interference, he feels bad and attempts to soften his criticism by qualifying it with disclaimers. He feels guilty and this impedes his movement towards independence. Rather than feeling free to pursue his own life's course, he is drawn back into dealing with conflicted feelings about the relationship with his mother. The mother's attempt to make him more responsible by focusing attention on his irresponsibility backfires. He feels less confident and therefore less independent and responsible because of her criticism.

She didn't realize that all she was doing was stressing me out trying to make be more responsible and making me more prone to do irresponsible

things. The only way you make someone responsible is just to leave them and if they can't figure it out themselves then they just never will. Like honestly, what can you do. Nothing.

The developmental task of creating an independent self is the major work of adolescence. The process begins somewhere in the first true meeting of mother and baby but has its normative crisis in adolescence (Erickson, 1968). Bowen (1978) explains this developmental activity as differentiating a self. In the development of a self there are two opposing forces - individuality and togetherness. These are instinctually rooted life forces in every human being that propel the developing child between one or the other. Individuality pushes the child to be an emotionally separate person, an individual with the ability to think, feel, and act for himself. Togetherness propels the child and family to think, feel, and act as one. "The result of these counterbalancing life forces is that one never achieves complete emotional separation from his family: The early attachment is never fully resolved" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 95). The degree of unresolved emotional attachment a person has to family parallels his level of differentiation. Anxiety is a major factor in the amount of emotional separation a person achieves from his family. Bowen (1978) would say that the anxiety projected onto Moses will have a profound effect on his ability to create an independent self. When a person is unable to separate because of the forces within the family which constantly pull him back, he will often use distance as a way of achieving autonomy. Since Moses feels his mother does not give him the space he needs to "stand on his own two feet," he creates distance by refusing to share important parts of himself with her.

I don't talk to her very much. I don't feel comfortable telling her things. Maybe it's because I don't feel I can trust her. I just don't feel she deserves to know. She hasn't treated me fairly. Like why should I tell her. She hasn't done anything to earn that. She always asks and I never tell her. I just say nothing.

Unfortunately, emotional distancing does not resolve the emotional attachment at the heart of the problem. Bowen describes a person with a high degree of differentiation as "one who can maintain emotional objectivity while in the midst of an emotional system in turmoil, yet at the same time actively relates to key people in the system" (Bowen, 1978, p. 473). This means that differentiation takes place in relationship to, not apart from, others. Distance, cut-off, and rebellion, which are often interpreted as acts of independence, are actually about emotional attachment.

Patterns of relating that we establish in our family of origin are carried into relationships outside our family. Moses' use of distance for maintaining a self in relation to his mother is his way of maintaining himself with others as well.

She'd (his girlfriend) get me so mad that I'd turn around and punch a hole in the wall. Now I just walk away. I don't let people get the best of me.

Now I just stay away from people I don't like or particularly care for. I don't talk to them. I don't associate with them.

Why would I keep somebody like that close to me (his girlfriend) if they're not good for me. Get rid of them no matter what. Who cares if you've been with them for a long time. Big deal.

In other situations, he compares his reciprocal way of behaving as a reflection.

It just seems like I'm a mirror. When people treat me a certain way I'll treat them just the same way back.

A well differentiated person is not a mirror. Actions and decisions are based not on what others do or think but on principles and a commitment to what is right. Moses is unable to take this course of action and merely reacts.

In our interviews, Moses refers to a number of issues that have caused him to be seen as a difficulty in family over the years, but at the present time independence is the major focus. He feels deprived of the opportunity to make his own way in the world because his mother sees him as a problem, a difficulty. In this position neither the mother nor Moses gets what she or he wants. Her lack of trust makes him less trustworthy and affects his confidence and ability to be independent. When I asked him if being thought of as a difficulty in his family affects the way he thinks about himself, he said

It changes your perspective on everything. It makes you negative. It makes you think you're bad. You just think you're difficult in general, not just in you're family.

Naomi's Story: "Walking on Egg Shells"

Right now I live with my mom and dad. My sister who's two years older moves back and forth. We get along when she's not living at the house. I have three part-time jobs at the moment but I'm starting back to school next month so I'll just be working at Thrifty's and going to school.

When I was sixteen I was in a car accident and that's when I started to have a lot of trouble in my family. I got really moody and was snarky all the time but I didn't know what was going on with me. I thought that I was just depressed. I became a school counsellor and I had to do a lot of reading and that's when I found out what was happening. The research I did said that car accidents can cause depression and I thought, "Wow this is it!"

The accident really changed my life. I used to do a lot of sports and I wasn't able to do them anymore. Friends would take off to rugby games or go to the beach and I'd have to be back by 3:30 to go to physio. Until then I was really happy-go-lucky. After the accident I just wasn't the same person and my parents would always say to me, "What's the matter with you? Are you on drugs?" It was like they were attacking me. My parents and my sister thought I was all screwed up. So did I. My sister would say things like, "You're a bitch, you're crazy." They didn't really know how to handle it but then I didn't help a lot either. Up until that point in my life if I had a problem my parents could fix it but they couldn't fix this and I was mad at them. I used to blame them, but now I just blame the car accident.

We did try and have talks and I'd say something and my parents would start yelling and I'm like, "Let me out of here." Yeah, I just take off. I started drinking a lot and even if I wasn't drinking I'd be out all the time. The

parents would be wondering what I was doing and that became a real problem because they felt neglected. I'd go to friends' houses all the time. My parents would say, "You can talk to their parents but you can't talk to us." But if you wanted to tell them something they'd get angry. They'd have a fit! We'd try to sit down and have big talks. We would try but it just didn't work.

Just the other day I was telling my mom about being bored with Victoria and the highschool scene and also I work and have a lot of organizing to do. I'm feeling kind of down, lonely. I'm always working. Instead of getting a bit of sympathy, "Oh yeah its hard," I get, "You don't think I'm organizing anything and I don't have work to do?" I want to say, "Wait a second here. I'm talking about me." I just say, "right," and leave her alone.

It doesn't feel like when I have a problem that my mom ever listens to me. My parents are going away to Maui and I thought that I would have the house to myself then I find out that their friends from England are going to come and stay for two weeks. This was supposed to be my time and she just brought it up at the last minute. "What were you going to do have them show up on the door step just before you go?" They didn't discuss it. All they said was, "It's our house and they're our friends. You're being selfish." "So why am I living here if this is your house?" A lot of stuff comes up. Don't they trust me? Am I fifteen again?

We're really having a difficult time right now. I try and talk to mom but she starts yelling. She raises her voice and I raise mine. We just keep doing it although it's not like it was when I was in highschool. I'm a little more secure now that there's no big threat. She can't say you're not going out this weekend or you can't have the car. When you're younger you feel absolutely helpless and there's no way out of anything. She doesn't have a big stick

anymore and she doesn't like that. It really bugs her that she doesn't have that control.

Lately we've been having these little run-ins. You phoned me and I thought, "I hope I can help you," and the day I came we had a huge fight. The issues that are coming up aren't anything to do with this but now, when my mom and I are fighting, I'm thinking about some of the things we've said. We mostly get along pretty well. Sometimes she'll say I'm a spoilt brat and I'll say she's a spoilt brat and we have a laugh about it. But sometimes she acts like a nursemaid too. "Naomiiii!" It's, "Oh God I feel like I'm fourteen again and I'm about to get into trouble." And the little things. She's concerned about what blouse I'm going to wear to work. I've already bought one but she starts dragging out her blouses and some black pants. "I don't want to wear your clothes. They don't fit. I don't like this embroidered stuff." She puts them in my room and I put them back downstairs. Then she puts them back up in my room again. Enough!

A lot of the time I don't really understand what she wants. It seems she'd like me to be an adult yet she won't treat me like one. She treats me like a child - mommy's little girl. I'll say, "Treat me like an adult," and she'll say, "Then behave like one," and the next time I come down the stairs I'm in shit for something else. When I go down in the morning is she going to ask me, "Where's the brush, or where's that CD?" It's always something. She freaks out about a lot of things. Then we'll bicker..we'll argue, we'll get into a spat. I think a lot of it is that I'm really too old to be living at home. The last few months I've been getting more and more annoyed every time she . . . "You need to do this. Don't forget to do that." Small things like returning a video. It's really annoying. It's really bugging me.

She likes me to rely on her but, at the same time, she gets mad if I do. She'll want to pay for something then she'll bring it up. "Well then don't help me out or don't pay for things if it's going to come back." It's the same with the school thing. If I don't pass my exams I'll probably hear, "We put out this money and you need to pay us back. You probably didn't work hard enough." When they pay for it it's like it's their thing but this is my thing. It's the same as what happened with insurance for my truck. My mom phoned me at work right at the lunch shift. I got really ticked off. I got so frustrated. I have to sell my truck but I can't afford the insurance while I'm selling it so my parents said we'll pay for the month. So come Tuesday when it was due I said, "Are you still paying for the insurance?" and - "You're not responsible. You should be paying for it. Where does all your money go? I'm constantly giving you money." "Like why did you offer and make this deal and then go back and make me feel bad about it?" So we had a really big tiff on the phone and like blah, blah, blah, click. She paid for the insurance but when I got home I didn't talk to her, didn't talk to her all day yesterday until finally at night she said, "Oh your hair looks nice. I didn't think you could get it like that on your own." She's trying to give me a compliment and we never even brought up the truck insurance.

My mom doesn't stick to one feeling and that really bugs me because I'm the type of person that carries through with what I say. I don't like to play games and it seems like she goes out of her way to really, really piss me off. Sometimes we'll actually have a good week and then it's almost like a little thing is created just to tick me off because it doesn't add up. "What am I in trouble for?" I shouldn't be getting in trouble for such a small thing. Oh

wow, where did she think of that or what's this about? She seems to like to get me for something!

It always seems like the same argument. I end up feeling the same way and that's why it's so hard for me to think up different examples about how I get into difficulty because they all feel the same. I end up so frustrated. I'll be upset but I'm not crying because my feelings are hurt or because "Oh mummy's mad at me." I'm just so frustrated, so frustrated. I have to say it's a really rare thing that we go a week without having a few of these little things. They don't necessarily go into a yelling match. I just get so . . . I give her the finger behind her back. I find myself doing that a lot.

I don't really have a problem with my dad. He is a nag but it doesn't bug me. I just laugh. "Do you have any dirty dishes up there or do you need anything?" He's just trying to be sweet. We've had a few run-ins but not very often. We don't really argue. My dad's such a softy. It's kind of like he's a blank in all of this really, he just goes about his own business. My mom and I don't really seem to fight around my dad because normally when we're together he's at work and then at the gym. I guess we're trying to be good around him or on our best behaviour. He can let things be. He's not a mom. He says, "I may as well not tell you what to do 'cause you're going to do what you want anyway." He doesn't want to hold my hand and take me to the bathroom. I'm still his little girl and he's protective in certain situations. I think he appreciates me. He knows I've been through a lot. He feels a bond with me so he kind of lets me go. "You've had a hard time. Have fun!"

There are times when I retaliate - getting my mom back saying "I'm going to go and get pissed." I'll say that just as I'm going out the door so she can sit at home and chew on it for awhile. Yeah I'll say stuff like that to get her

going, just to wind her up. Or I might wear something she doesn't like or do my hair in a way I know she hates. Yeah I'm trying to pay her back, even the score. I don't do it as much or as often as she does. If she's not going to try why should I keep trying. And it does wear on you. If I'm at work and I've had a problem with my mom it will bug me. It will really bug me. I'll just be quiet. Someone will say, "What's wrong?" "Oh just mom bugging me." I'll daydream. I'll be thinking, "I wish I could move out. I wish she'd let me know what her problem with me is or I wish she could just relax or. . ." "Once I said to her, "This is my life. You've lived yours. Are you trying to relive it through me?" That really pissed her off.

She doesn't appreciate that I'm a fairly normal teenager considering what I've been through. My dad does acknowledge it but she's like, "Oh poor baby," and I think, "What a bitch. She has no idea!" I mean I love my mom and we play crib together and stuff. We get along most of the time but it's just these little things really do bug me. We have this conflict going and I know it's never going to end. I know even when I'm on my own she'll come by my apartment and she'll want me to use this table or that chair. "I don't want it!" That will bug her too. I just won't let her in but she'll probably have a key.

I tried over the past few years to talk to her, tried to work things out but she gets so defensive. I haven't really gotten there yet. I know if I tell her to leave me alone she'll ignore me and then if I try to talk to her she'll go on reading. It seems that when I try and talk to her things just get worse. I used to throw things but I don't do that anymore. I just leave and then I talk to them after a few days and tell them where I am. It's a way to cool off and also it's a way to get back at them. I'd actually stay a bit longer if it was really bad. I was a little pain in the butt in some respects. I knew that I'd be able to get my

own way or get them to not be mad 'cause by the time I got home mom would be all sorry or dad would suck up to me so after a while I'd know that I could do that. It meant that I could make my point or make my opinion count because my family didn't really sit around and talk. Even now if I sit my mom down and say you're getting on my nerves it ends in a fight and she'll go sulk. I don't like to be around tension too long because I get so frustrated.

Parents should just leave their kids, not be so hyped up about everything. It's frustrating enough to be at this age. We've already got enough to worry about without having to worry about what our parents are thinking. Parents need to support their kids even if they don't agree. Let them go through it even if sometimes they don't follow through at least be behind them. Support their ideas unless they're really farfetched. You need to learn everything from experience. I think parents should just stand by their kids and not be too involved. Kids pick professions that parents don't believe in but kids don't always like what the parents do either. Parents need to just accept that kids grow up. If you treat someone like a child then they're going to act like it and you're going to be continuously banging heads. I just wish my mom could let me be so we could be friends, just stop being such a mother.

My sister tries to be friends now but there's a lot of stuff there. She was mean to me for all those years and the older sister is supposed to cover up for the little sister. Even at this age my friends always bug me about it, about my sister always telling on me. She's twenty-one and she's still saying, "I'm telling mom. I'm going to tell mom on you." A couple of years ago my parents went away - no parties and that kind of stuff. I thought it would be

okay to have three or four of my friends over to watch a movie and have a few beers. My sister came home and had a big fit, phones my uncle at 1:00 in the morning. There was a big family fight and I didn't talk to my uncle for a long time. My sister exaggerates. She's a drama queen. She makes a big deal out of anything just to get me in trouble. She gets so excited about stuff and my parents believe her because I'm this younger little pain in the butt. My parents worried about me because I used to take off and she felt insecure about all the attention I got. My sister got along with my dad but she didn't get along with my mom very well. But she was smart. If they'd have a fight somehow I would be involved and then it would be my fault so the attention would be drawn away from her to me. "Guess what Naomi did?"

Having so many problems with my mom makes me feel like I'm not good enough, not doing this, not doing that. It's like you can't be perfect all the time but I think she expects that. I used to give in to her when I was little. It's like, "How high is this pedestal that she has me on, wants me to be on?" I'm climbing, climbing and I'm never going to be what she wants. "What do you want?" I always say to her. "What do you want from me?" Even if I think my mom's wrong or being ridiculous it still brings me down. If I'm already feeling badly about myself and then I get it from her then I think maybe she's right.

It's like I'm always waiting for something, that feeling like I walk around on egg shells. And I have come to recognize that. Yeah I'm feeling that a lot but also I'm used to it so I don't really pay much attention to it. Like this morning I hear my dad come home from work and I can hear this chatter, kind of weird tones and I think, "Oh Christ, I know there's going to be something I've done." I don't do it intentionally but it seems like I say the

wrong thing at the wrong time or I word a thing the wrong way or in a way that they might find insulting and that can set things off.

Sometime I think, "I'm not doing anything," so it's almost like they're the problem. They're the difficulty and sometimes I really think they are. Like my mom's trying to create something, like she's just picking, picking - yeah, I put a lot on them. I've really learned to stick up for myself because either my sister is trying to get me in trouble or mom's going after me. I don't take crap. I don't treat people badly but I won't take a lot. If my friends won't stick up for themselves I'll stick up for them. My friends say, "brow Naomi," because everyone knows I'll stick up for myself. I don't get too hyped up about things but as soon as someone does something to me or my friends I'm really affected.

Actually my mom and I are very similar in some ways. We both fight for our own way but we're both really easygoing. When it comes to who's right in the house and who gets the attention from my dad she'll say I get it and I'll say she gets it. It's kind of scary. There are pictures of her when she was my age and we look exactly the same. Most of the time it's fine but it's just these little things that are really annoying.

If a miracle happened I'd wake up and my mom would say, "Good morning," and not ask me about uniforms, or say, "Don't you have to do this today?" She'd say, "Good morning," not worrying about what I'm going to be doing as in chores or taking care of this or that. Just a normal conversation like something you might have with your friends. Like, "What are you going to do today?" No "Where's the curling iron?" kind of thing. There would just be normal conversation and not, "Get that truck sold!" or, "you've got to worry about this or that." Just a normal conversation without worries

about those kind of little things that really shouldn't be thought about first thing in the morning when you wake up and have barely opened your eyes. There wouldn't be, "You're home late. I thought you were off at 3:30?" I'm late. It's just that. Just those little things, just all those little things. They wouldn't be there because things would be normal and fine. I wouldn't be feeling like I was walking on egg shells.

There wouldn't be a lot of anxious kind of questions. Questions, too many questions. I don't like questions. My mom asks me questions. My sister asks me questions. I don't want to answer all those questions. They're irrelevant and stupid. They're all alike. You might as well throw me in a seat and have a spot light and just have a go. Let's get it over with. I don't like the questions. I'm old enough to deal with them myself. I'm old enough to organize myself. I can put myself together without my mom worrying about it. I want to have an apartment, some candles, just relax. A little space, down time. I'm home at 3:30; I'm driving out to Collwood to see my friends; I'm going out to the pub. Who cares? I don't want to answer those questions. I just am and that's it!

Hyper-Vigilance

The title of Naomi's story, "Walking on Egg Shells," is the metaphor she uses to describe her experience of living in family. For her this means she cannot predict, from one moment to the next, what will cause her grief. There is no solid ground on which to tread.

God, this is going to be hell working and school. I'm going to be so tired and I'm going to have this nursemaid walking around. I just really, really hoped this ten months could go really, smoothly, and that I could achieve a lot and be content - things could be easy going at the house - not that feeling like I walk around on egg shells. It's weird how I actually feel like that and I don't even really acknowledge it. I'm always waiting for something. Like this morning, I hear my dad come home from work and I can hear this chatter - kind of weird tones - and I thought, Oh Christ, I know there's going to be something I've done.

On some level, although she is not always consciously aware of it, Naomi is on the alert, waiting for something to happen. Much of her time is spent trying to foresee and to prevent situations that could lead to conflict. This same way of managing is common to children in alcoholic families. Children in such families develop exceptional acuity to changes in significant family members. Avoidance of conflict is the motivating force (Spickard & Thompson, 1985). As a result, energy that should be used for the task of growing up is used to keep oneself out of trouble. It is a losing battle. In Naomi's case, her best efforts are eventually foiled. Even when life seems to be moving along at a fairly even pace, problems arise out of nowhere.

We'll actually have a good week and then it's almost like something is created. It's almost like a little thing is created to just tick me off 'cause it doesn't add up. I might be cranky and say the wrong thing at the wrong time or word a thing the wrong way that they might find insulting. But it doesn't need to be dealt with. It's not a big deal. Like, oh wow, where did she think of that or what's this about?

Looking through a Bowen family systems lens, (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) Naomi's mother's unpredictable behaviour is viewed as a way of binding or absorbing anxiety. She expresses her anxiety in criticism of Naomi. This triggers a reaction in her daughter that ends in conflict. The conflict provides a solution to a relationship dilemma: focusing on another affords emotional contact while stubborn refusal to do what another wants provides emotional distance. The result, according to Bowen (1978), is a relationship, that, while tumultuous, is enduring.

At times, difficult issues are negotiated and settled, but even these are often retracted or changed. Naomi uses the following example to illustrate this point.

She offered to pay for the insurance on my truck. So come Tuesday - that's when it was due - I phone and said are you still paying for the insurance and I get, "You're not responsible. You should be paying for it." Like why did she offer and make this deal and then go back and make me feel bad about it.

For Naomi, experience is often at odds with what is said or agreed to. Lang (1969) refers to this occurrence as "the credibility gap between what one cannot but help see is going on, and the story that is told" (p. 10). When family members try to talk about their experiences the family denies their

reality. They do this by invalidating how the person has perceived an experience. This is precisely what Naomi's mother does when Naomi tells her why she is coming to talk to me.

She said, "You weren't a difficulty" and I said, "What are you talking about? You remind me of it all the time." But she didn't want to hear that because that makes her feel bad. "It's not a big deal everyone has problems." "Yeah," she said, "everyone had problems, but you weren't a difficulty." So it's almost like my daughter's too good to be a difficulty. She thinks high of me but then she insults me. The message is so mixed. It's really confusing to feel that all the time.

When there is a credibility gap, there is concerted family resistance to discovering what is really going on. Truth has to be expended to sustain the family image (Lang, 1969). What Naomi sees, feels, believes - what is beyond question in her experience - is discounted by her mother. This is not a deliberate ploy on her mother's part. Neither is aware of the structure in which she is involved or the role either plays in generating and perpetuating it. Both offer explanations as to why the other behaves in a particular way. Focusing on the other is common when problems arise in a relationship, but if the credibility gap is to be bridged each member of the family needs to focus on his/her own functioning.

A number of times Naomi expressed the hopelessness she felt about ever having a different kind of relationship with her mother. In the first example given below, her frustration is clearly evident in the questions she asks, especially when she asks what her mother wants of her. In the next example, the futility of her position is captured when she talks about her mother having a key to her apartment.

It's like how high is this pedestal she has me on, wants me to be on? It's like climbing, climbing, climbing. I'm never going to be what she wants. Like what do you want? I always say, what do you want from me?

I know it's never going to end and I know even when I'm on my own she'll come by to my apartment and she'll probably want me to use this table or that chair. I don't want it! which will bug her too. I just won't let her in but she'll probably have a key.

There is no getting away from the fact that this continuous friction has an effect on Naomi and wears her down. She begins to doubt her own perception.

Oh it will bug me, oh it will really really bug me. I'll be real quiet. It makes me feel like I'm not good enough. Not doing this, not doing that. It's like you can't be perfect all the time, like I think she expects that. I used to give in to her when I was younger. ... Yeah it brings you down. If you're having a down day - like oh God - I'm already feeling badly from me beating myself up about something. Then you get it from her. It's like then maybe she's right.

Triangles

Thus far, the majority of attention has been paid to the relationship between Naomi and her mother. Using Bowen's (1978) concept of triangling contextualizing this relationship to include the entire family. The predominant triangle that concerns this analysis is the one consisting of Naomi, her mother and her father. In any triangle, at any given time, two of those involved will be close while one person will be on the outside. If the triangle is a conflicted one, it is best to be the outsider. In a less anxious

triangle the most favorable position is to be one of the close twosome. Flexibility and movement are the marks of healthy triangles. It is when triangles become fixed that problems are created and maintained (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Guerin, Fogarty, Fay & Kautto, 1996).

In the most active triangle, Naomi and her mother are the close twosome with the father in the outside position. This triangle is long standing and has little flexibility. The image that Naomi presents of her father calling out from the living room to "give it a rest" while she and her mother "go at it" in the kitchen unequivocally captures the form of this triangle. This is as close as the father gets. The father at times supports the mother but only in an auxiliary sort of way. On occasion, Naomi and her father argue but, for the most part, this job is left to the mother. A systems therapist working with this family would change the dynamic of this triangle by engaging the father. He would be encouraged to take over the work of disciplining Naomi. The mother would be coached to concentrate her energies on positive exchanges with her daughter. This type of shift can bring about dramatic changes in the family. Family therapists (Bowen, 1978; Guerin et al., 1996; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) contend that a triangle such as this was most likely created to alleviate tension in the marital dyad. They would predict that if the relationship between Naomi and her mother improved, then before long, difficulties would surface between the parents.

A secondary triangle exists between the mother, Naomi, and the sister. The older sister has always been more responsible and sides with the mother against Naomi. Whenever there is a stronger alliance between one child and a parent than between siblings, an imbalance exists. Guerin et al., (1996) found that fragmented sibling subsystems most frequently exist in families

where one child is a symptom-bearer. This child is invariably the one in the outside position in the triangle. It is natural that at times one sibling will side with a parent against a brother or sister but when this dynamic becomes fixed there is a problem. In this triangle, Naomi is the outsider while the mother and sister form an alliance. This outside position has not afforded Naomi sibling support in times of stress. When Naomi was in a traffic accident and her relationship with her family became strained her sister didn't understand.

My sister attacked me. She said, "You're a bitch, you're crazy" and all that kind of stuff.

Woven through the stories that Naomi relates is her desire to be less involved with her family and to be more of a separate self, yet, her emotional sensitivity to those she lives with ties her tightly to them. Kerr & Bowen (1988) refer to extreme sensitivity to others as fusion indicating a low level of differentiation. The emotional interdependence among all members of the family, as manifested by the the lack of flexibility in the various triangles, generates a high level of chronic anxiety. It is no wonder that in her daydreams Naomi lives on her own in an apartment "with some candles, just relaxing." She says she "can't take too much tension" and has managed her inability to tolerate anxiety in her teenage years by "taking off when things heated up." She recognizes, however, that this does not offer any lasting solution. When she returns home after an absence it is not long before she is "walking on egg shells," constantly on the alert for potential problems. Even when she imagines living on her own, she knows she won't

be able to keep her mother out of her apartment because "she'll have her own key." Naomi's dilemma reminds me of an story told by Schnarch (1991), a psychiatrist who uses Bowen theory in his work. At the end of a course of therapy one of his clients said that the most important thing she had learned was not to let anyone slip "his key under my pillow" (p. 333). The meaning of this statement has to do with differentiation - the ability to remain connected to others yet separate. Because Naomi is unable to maintain a self in connection with her family, she hopes that physical distance will provide some "emotional insulation." Although it will, for a time, reduce her anxiety, if she is pushed to discuss emotionally charged topics with her family, the anxiety will reappear. Differentiation cannot be achieved by either physical or emotional distance.

Family Roles

Early on in our interview, Naomi casts each family member in a role: The mother is "a nursemaid," the father is "a blank," and the sister is "a drama queen." She refers to herself as "a little pain in the butt."

These labels describe well entrenched roles that each person plays out in family. The impact of these designated positions, according to Block (1994), not only identifies a role but constructs an identity which shapes the image of who we are and what we are destined to become. In Naomi's family, as is often the case, labels are used to depict negative characteristics and serve to further the very traits which are scorned. Rigid roles also prevent family members from truly knowing one another. Bowen (1978) claims that we often come out of our family of origin known only as caricatures created by a family togetherness process. Block (1994) confirms this notion stating that

Brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers represent dramatically opposing human tendencies which only when added all together make up a satisfying whole. In exchange for the privilege of participating in the family drama, each individual is condemned to live as a fragment of himself, and never develop into the whole human being he could have been. (p. 21)

a little pain in the butt.

This label is often given to a youngest child and the person with the lowest status in the family. "A pain in the butt" is something everyone can do without but which, none the less, demands attention. At times, Naomi rebels against her ascribed position.

I want to be independent. I don't want to be mommy's little girl!

I want her to stay out of my life. If I'm not doing something the way she wants me to I don't want her yelling at me like I'm a little kid in trouble, like that's the worse thing at this age. Like don't do this, do that.

At other times, particularly when things are calm, she takes pleasure in fulfilling her role. She uses the opportunity to get back at her mother for her "nagging and interference."

Yeah, just getting my mom back saying, "I'm going to go and get pissed." Just little shots just to wind her up. I'll be going out the door anyway so she can sit at home and chew on it for a while. I get her back on the weekends . . . I'll do things. I might wear something she hates or do my hair in a way I know she hates.

She'll say, "Well you're not drinking and driving are you?" It's like she may as well come out and call me stupid so that's when I'll retaliate. I'll say, "Yeah I'm going to get in the car pissed and then hit a few kids on the way home and then I'm going to smash into a tree."

In playing either the role of "little pain in the butt" or rebelling against it, the connection to her mother is evident. Neither are thoughtful positions but emotional reactions.

Emotional reactivity is a common way to manage difficulties. There are times when Naomi attempts to avoid confrontation by being hyper-vigilant. When this strategy is unsuccessful and she "bangs heads" with her mother, a middle ground, where problems can be discussed and resolved, is not an option.

We did try and have talks and I say something and my parents would start yelling and like, let me out of here.

Sometimes I'll just sit her down and I'll say you're getting on my nerves. It can get into a fight or sometimes she'll go sulk.

a blank.

The father, whom Naomi describes as a "blank," withdraws from family squabbles, spending his time at work or at the gym. If there is a controversy between Naomi and her mother he does his best to stay out of the way. He can be somewhat of a nag but his nagging is innocuous. When Naomi first used the word "blank" to describe her father, I was taken aback. To me a blank says you're nothing, you don't count - better to be a bitch. I hesitantly explored her understanding of this description. She did not view this label as

particularly negative. "Blank" refers more to the functional position he holds in family than to him as a person. Naomi feels understood and supported by him.

He's able to let go. I'm his little girl but he's still protective in a sense in certain situations. He kind of lets me do my own thing. I think he appreciates me for getting out after high school after I had those problems. My dad feels a bond with me because he knows I've been through a lot.

a bitch and a nursemaid.

The mother is the central character in this family narrative and is assigned two roles: a bitch and a nursemaid. Naomi uses the term bitch to describe her mother when she feels criticized and nursemaid when she feels thwarted by her mother's interference. She describes a situation where she tells her mother about her feelings of being overwhelmed with work and school.

So instead of getting a bit of sympathy I get: "Oh poor baby! You don't think I have lots to organize and do as well. I think, "What a bitch." She has no idea.

The mother is perceived as a nursemaid when she treats Naomi like a child and offers opinions about her hair, her clothes, and her life style.

I think she really wants to treat me like a child. She wants me to be an adult yet she won't treat me like one. I always tell her that and she's like, "Then behave like one first." I'll say, "I am." But the next time I come down the stairs, I'm in shit for something else. She acts like a nursemaid. I get in trouble and I hear "Naooooommii." It's like oh God, I feel like I'm fourteen again.

a drama queen.

Naomi attaches the label "drama queen" to her sister. The sister makes a big deal out of everything. "She exaggerates. She's a drama queen. Anything to get me in trouble." She eschewed the role Naomi believes a big sister ought to play, that is, "the older sister covering up for the little sister." Whenever there was trouble the sister managed to get the focus off herself and on to Naomi.

She didn't get along with my mom very well but if they'd have a fight somehow I was involved and then it would be my fault. "Guess what Naomi's done?" My friends always bug me about it. Even at this age - she's twenty-one - she's still saying, "I'm telling mom."

Relationships that we establish with our siblings early in life can last a lifetime and affect other relationships. When we try to revise our pictures of our parents and of ourselves, images of our brothers and sisters can linger to haunt us. Block (1994) says, "Our sibling's portraits are the backdrop for our own self portraits, their narratives are choreographed with ours" (p. 82). The continued scraping between the two sisters keeps Naomi in the position of "little pain in the butt" while the sister "telling mom" keeps her in the position of "drama queen."

Social constructionists tell us: "There is no laboratory in which to study identity apart from the social context in which it evolves" (Block, 1994, p. 85). Naomi's identity to some extent is and will continue to be shaped by her role in family and her negative relationship with her sister.

The Researcher's Story: "Speaking Out"

It seems to me, I was both criticized and admired for being a difficulty in my family. This contradiction is captured in a picture from our family album. We had a series of photographs taken when I was about three. All are typical family shots except for one where I am struggling to get off my oldest brother's knee (he was fourteen years older than I was). The white hand-smocked dress I am wearing has been pushed up around my waist as I make my descent from his lap to the floor. My underpants are clearly in view. The determined expression on my face indicates my intention: I have somewhere to go. My oldest brother looks semi-amused while my other brother (one year old than I) looks annoyed. Why was this picture kept? Neither of my parents is alive to ask so it is left to me to interpret both the incident and the keeping of the picture. In so doing I acknowledge Kuhn's (1995) claim that

Family photographs may affect to show us our past, but what we do with them - how we use them - is really about today, not yesterday. These traces of our former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, remaking, making sense of, our selves - now. (p. 16)

In the memory work I am engaged in, as I search for connection between my experience of being a difficulty and my participants' experience, this picture offers a visual image of the contradictory message often received by scapegoated children. It is obvious that I was not cooperating, not willing to sit on my brothers lap and have my photo taken. This disruptive behaviour caused trouble for my parents, my brothers and the photographer. When the time arrived to select which photos would be kept and which would be

discarded, this picture was saved. Something made it worth keeping. I believe my parents at times saw my being difficult as charming and desirable while at other times found it to be annoying and distressing. This interpretation is consistent with Pillari (1991) who noted that parents who scapegoated a child conveyed implicit and explicit expectations that are subtly different from one another.

This picture is representative of the discourse of "outspokenness" that I took on as the family difficulty. Even when I wasn't speaking "my mind" with words I was speaking out in the way I acted and in the way I dressed. From the time of this photo until my mid-twenties, being the family difficulty was a significant part of my identity.

My speaking out was often in reaction to my father who, it appeared to me, always had the last word. At some point, my mother decided that conflict was to be avoided at all cost so "peace at any price" became her way of dealing with controversy. This philosophy achieved the desired peace, but at a cost. My mother's unwillingness to stand up for herself, to speak out, avoided outward displays of emotion but contributed to underlying tension. Bowen (1978) contends that unresolved relationship issues create anxiety which predictability are expressed in one or more of the following ways: marital conflict, physical or emotional disorder in one of the spouses, or a child focus. In my family, anxiety was first expressed in a child focus and later in physical illness.

Many factors contribute to a family becoming child-focused. Even before my birth I was viewed as a "special child." My mother was forty-three, had just had a baby after waiting thirteen years, and was not planning to have another child. In the period between my oldest and youngest brothers' birth,

two babies had died. I was the first girl after four boys and, as the story goes, was to be the sunshine of my father's life. Until recently, I made no connection between my "specialness" in family and my outspokenness. In fact I took considerable pride in my forthrightness and thought of myself as being more courageous than my mother and brothers who would back down in an argument with my father. In rethinking this conviction I have come to a different conclusion. I believe my position as a special child gave me permission to break the silence without jeopardizing my father's love - a permission the others did not have. I could say, without fear of rejection, what my mother and brothers could not

My shift in family from a "difficulty" to a "responsible adult" began with the death of my mother when I was twenty-two. Circumstance offered me the opportunity to challenge the family prophesy of a difficulty and to take up an alternate position. As often happens in families one mythical position is exchanged for an equally unrealistic position. Neither position represents a well thought out choice and shuts out the possibility for the person to become an authentic self. Freud (1966) uses the term "paradoxical equivalent" to describe what happens when one mythological identity is replaced by another. The transition can be from a negative identity to a positive one, or the reverse can occur. Negative identities that are constructed in reaction to the family prophecies inadvertently fulfill the very identities they are seeking to circumvent. In my case where I assumed a positive identity, I often felt like an imposter. When I became a teacher, I felt most comfortable with the boys who struggled in school and were often in trouble. More than one of these troublesome boys told me I didn't "act" like a teacher. Of course I didn't; I didn't feel like a teacher. Sitting at my desk one afternoon, staring out the

window as I had done when I was a child wishing I were somewhere else, I realized being the teacher was at best no different, and perhaps worse, than being a student. I had always hated school, yet here I was in charge of thirty eight-year-olds. It was not fun! My plan had been to attend university for a few years, join a sorority, flunk out, and become an airline stewardess. This design was well suited to my conception of self and family position. In the short period of three years since my mother's death I had given up my "errant ways," married and taken on a responsible job. Although I was far more responsible than my role as family difficulty suggested, my new alternate position was a poor fit. I had gone from one extreme to another, bypassing the well considered place in the middle which Bowen (1978) refers to as a differentiated position. This position is not governed by the expectations and anxieties of others but is principle-oriented and goal-directed. Block (1994) says this is where we find our "true self" once we have shed our mythical identities, but she also notes that the process is arduous and not easily achieved.

Even when real change does occur, and life as we have actually lived it challenges the mythic identities we have adopted as children, we do not always digest the new information available to us and continue to distort our perceptions. (p. 26)

It is possible to change and take on new identities but vestiges of our former identities remain. When I was a school teacher, I worked hard and took my job seriously, but beneath that conventional surface was still the outspoken, rebellious person of my growing up years. It took time for me to integrate my responsible self with my former difficult self. I found a way to

manage differences between the two roles by turning my attention to alternate forms of education which had begun to emerge at the time I was teaching. Joining those on the fringe satisfied both my need to be responsible and rebellious.

There are times when our identities serve us and times when they don't. Recently I had the opportunity to enter into a discussion about a mutual difficulty with one of my professors and several of my colleagues. It seemed to me that a worthwhile way of solving the problem would be to write an article. I put forth this idea and almost simultaneously the words "Why don't you three write an article" were out of my mouth. They responded by asking me why I wouldn't participate. Reflecting on this incident later, I recognized that my reply was rooted in my former identity as a difficulty. I was in Grade nine again and Sister Mary Genevieve's flushed face was saying, "I have never heard of a student saying no to a nomination to run for class president." What was the matter with me? It was a honor and I should accept the nomination. An honor! It was sheer madness! Didn't she know I was in this boarding school because I was in trouble. What other possible explanation could there be when someone is made to leave their friends and their family to live with strangers? Besides, if I did run and win I wouldn't have the foggiest idea of how to be a class president. I was a class difficulty not a class president!

And here I was again with my colleagues and an opportunity to take on responsibility but my old identity was saying no, you don't fit here. Difficult students do not write articles with Sister Mary Ann Beverly or Sister Mary Monica. In the split second before I suggested that I not participate, I put aside thirty years of being responsible and was once again a difficult kid in school.

Psychoanalysts, according to Block (1994), argue that it is precisely because we have appropriated other's descriptions of ourselves that we do not recognize our reactions to situations for what they are. We do not experience these descriptions as alien to ourselves and therefore they become the least vulnerable to change. Numerous times in my life I have allowed my former identity to constrict my choices but in this case I did recognize the underlying cause of my reaction and was able to make a decision based not on my former identity but on a realistic evaluation of the present circumstances.

My Relationship to the Participants

As I mentioned in the introduction, it was during the course of my inquiry that I became aware of my connection to the phenomenon under study. It therefore seemed appropriate to have someone ask me the same questions that I would be asking my participants. Elizabeth, a friend and counsellor also involved in doing research, agreed to be the interviewer. Two months passed between the time of my conversation with Elizabeth and the interview with my first participant. Another three months transpired before all the interviews were completed and I returned to reread my transcript. I mention this time line to make the reader aware of the distance between the sharing of my experience and looking at that experience in relation to my participants. The interview material I had collected was extensive and fascinating. The thought of returning to my own transcript held no appeal. I had plenty to write about; why bother with my story? Then I read *Social Science and the Self* which brought to my attention the importance of locating oneself in relation to the phenomenon being investigated. I pulled out my transcript and began to read. I was quickly

jolted out of my disinterest. More than thirty years separated me and my participants, yet in some instances we had, almost word for word, responded in the same way. I was stunned. During the interviews sessions I had inklings of having said something similar but nothing had struck me as being particularly alike. So the question arises: Why hadn't I seen my story in their story until I reread my transcript? I believe there are a number of reasons for this blindness which pertains not only to me but also to my participants.

Bollas (1987) offers a plausible explanation for my insensibility to the connection between our experiences. Because I had never articulated my experiences, never actually said I was thought of as the difficulty in my family, these thoughts were "unthought knowns" and remained outside my awareness.

The object can cast its shadow without a child being able to process this relation through mental representations or language, as, for example, when a parent uses his child to contain projective identifications. While we do know something of the character of the object which affects us, we may not have thought it yet. (p. 4)

He goes on to speak of the work of psychoanalysis as a "reliving through language of that which is known but not yet thought" (p. 4).

Although I do not intend to equate my inquiry to psychoanalysis, I do think the process of putting the experience of being thought of as a difficulty into words created previously unthought of knowledge. On some level knowing did exist for me and my participants but in a nascent form that only evolved through the medium of language in conversation with one another. Anderson & Goolishian (1988) in support of this conception contend that

Conversation - language and communicative action - is simply part of the hermeneutic struggle to reach understanding with those with whom we are in contact. Said differently, language does not mirror nature; language creates the natures we know. Meaning and understanding do not exist prior to the utterances of language. (p. 378)

What I came to know in conversation with Elizabeth was to a large extent unfamiliar to me. Many of the stories I had told before, but they had been related in different contexts and in response to other questions. Fitting the stories into a different frame, initiated by the researcher's questions, produced a new way of thinking about my experience. The most prominent feature of my responses to the interview questions were my protestings that I was not a difficulty.

I never thought of myself as being bad. (I repeated this sentence four times).

I never really understood why I was always in trouble. It just didn't make sense to me.

Initially I did not link my story to my participants' stories because, even though at the time of my interview I had begun to admit to being part of the phenomenon, I, like all my participants, protested and denied this assigned identity in family.

Given the fact that all the participants initially acknowledged the designation of a family difficulty, it is of significant interest that at some point in our conversation all rejected this portrayal. As great as my concern was

about the potential my research question had for narrowing my participants identity, I believe naming their experience gave them something to come up against and ultimately to reject. Conceptions that people have about themselves are often disjointed until they are located in a story (Davies & Harre, 1990). Ochberg (1994) points to the relationship between the telling of a life story and the possibilities this telling offers for altering that story. His contention is that life stories provide a vehicle for fashioning an identity and that individuals do not merely tell stories, after the fact, about their experiences; instead, they live out their affairs in storied forms. "For a life, like a story, is a kind of *argument*. It is a way of claiming that one construction of experience should be privileged and that some other, negative alternative should be dismissed" (p. 116).

The construction of a story in the form of an argument is apparent in the description of experiences relayed by my participants. Woven through the interviews are incidents which avow them as a difficulty and incidents that repudiate this designation. In the following examples, acknowledgement of their contribution to the problem is evident.

Joseph

Maybe when I'm flying off the handle people are definitely noticing and you sort of feel well now I'm the problem child and you sort of get into the routine of being the problem child.

Like it's both sides. I've been a problem. I'm not blaming my mom for the problem. I was a big part of it. It was hurtful to me because I sort of wrecked the relationship as well.

Esther

I breached my probation, community hours, everything cause I didn't do anything.

I do act out. Teenagers do act out. It's normal to act out. It's all part of being a teenager.

(Esther does not actually own up to the part she plays in her difficulties, but merely gives us hints as to how she may be implicated.)

Noah

A lot of time I was blamed because I was the problem. I don't really think I was unfairly blamed.

Moses

She brought me up pretty much by herself and I'm sure I was a pain in the ass to bring up you know. I was always a confrontational type, like when I was little I can remember I use to argue with my neighbours and stuff just to get a rise out of them for no particular reason.

Naomi

I'd stay actually a bit longer if it was really bad. I was a little pain in the butt in some respects. I knew that. I'd be able to get my own way.

Although in these conversation excerpts the participants admit to being part of the problem, ultimately they all reject their designation as a difficulty. Congruent with this interpretation Block (1994) writes

Each of us wrestles with his or her "destiny" as it has been prophesied within our families. Indeed, sometimes, instead of allowing our lives to unfold as expected, we, like tragic heroes, consciously defy our "fate" and, yearning to be free, struggle to disentangle ourselves from the web of ideas in which we are our own prisoners. (p. 25)

This action is consistent with Ochberg's (1994) belief that a life story will be told in such a way that a negative identity will be overcome and supplanted by a self-idealizing identity. Lopez (1990) also recognizes the work accomplished by a story in maintaining a positive self-image. He claims "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them" (p. 60).

Because participants are at a different place in their story of being considered the family difficulty they find a unique way of overcoming their negative designation. Noah speaks of himself as changed since he became a father.

It's definitely turned me in a new direction . . . I want my kid to listen to me. Not have as much trouble as I've had.

In his new role he is moving away from his identity as a difficulty towards a more responsible self which will be a good example for his child. Esther's story offers a strong argument against her appointed position. She says

My adopted parents have made me realize that my parents are the ones with the problem and that they are missing out on my wonderful life. I've never been the family problem. I may have felt that I am but I've never been the family problem because my parents are the ones that are the adults and they are the ones that are the problem to tell you the truth.

Joseph takes the tack that things are improving for him.

It's getting better now as I get older and more mature but it use to be a real battle every time.

Right now the problems are getting less and we're dealing with them a lot better which is good.

I used to see myself as a problem but not anymore. My family used to say my temper was a big problem but I would always say that it takes someone to trigger my temper. I don't just fly off for no reason. I'm not sure that they understood that but I'll say I was a problem but it takes two to make problem.

Moses contends that he is doing just fine; it's his mother that has the problem.

She thinks I'm bad sometimes but I know I'm not because I know people that are bad and I know I'm not like them but she doesn't. She just doesn't understand.

Naomi has come to recognize that the messages she gets from her mom are confusing and that she's not the one with the problem.

It's so mixed. It's really confusing to feel like that all the time and actually I just kind of recognized that. I think, I'm not doing anything so it's almost like they're the problem - they're the difficulty and sometimes I think they are . . . Yeah I'll put a lot on them.

What I have presented here is not the final story. One does not make something of oneself once and for all (Ochberg, 1994). The participants, despite their disclaimers, continue to struggle with their defined position in family. In the stories told to me they have all made progress in overcoming their family designation, but there are days when being the family difficulty continues to play a prominent place in their lives. And long after they have left their family of origin and have "almost forgotten" the role they played in family, they may, like me, catch themselves making choices that perpetuates the past and sets limits on the future. I would agree with Block (1994) about the critical impact that family positions can have on our lives.

Our family portraits are ageless; they hover over us throughout our lives, casting shadows which obscure our features so that we are no longer recognizable. These portraits are so colorful and appear to us so vividly that, despite our numerous disclaimers, we frequently mistake them for true reflections of ourselves. Consequently, although these images of who we are originate within the context of our early-childhood relationships, they have far-reaching implications for how we live our lives long after we "grow up" and leave home. When we think through these images, and feel through these images, we live them, and that becomes our life. (p. 22)

What I have come to see is that all members of a family "wrestle with (their) destiny as it has been prophesied within a family" (Block, 1994, p. 25).

Recently I had the opportunity to talk with two people who are struggling to escape the family designation of "the responsible child." Their thinking is that the family difficulty had all the fun!

Each family role carries its own burdens. The burdens are not equal and for many children designated as the family difficulty the load is crushing. In keeping with Ochberg's (1994) notion of a life story as an argument that works at rescuing a person's "self-ideal from the risk of negation" (p. 143). Moses and Naomi offer a positive side to being thought of as the family difficulty.

Moses

In a way I'm glad (about being thought of as a difficulty) because it's made me really strong. Do you know what I mean? I've dealt with a lot of things really that most people haven't. . . . When you deal with such stress things don't really seem that bad some times. You just know you're going to get over it. . . . Things don't seem out of proportion. I don't know, I just think it prepares you for the real world. If it doesn't kill it only makes you stronger, which is true.

Naomi

In a way I was thinking the other day I'm glad that I didn't have everything handed to me on a silver platter 'cause I wouldn't be the same person I'm today. If I did I'd be someone who doesn't know about life and takes advantage of everything

CHAPTER 5: COMING TO THE END

When I began this inquiry, I remember thinking that now, at last, I would have the opportunity to do an exhaustive exploration of a subject that interested me. So often when I was writing papers for various courses in graduate school, I felt frustrated by time constraints that prevented me from delving deeply into a particular area. Over the past two and a half years, my interest in the focused-on child has been unwavering. I have read about it, thought about and spoken about it to friends, family, colleagues and those who are the subject of this inquiry. Yet I cannot pretend that what I present here begins to be an exhaustive study. As I draw together my last thoughts on this subject, a phrase Scott Peck uses time and time again in his many books rings persistently in my ears: "I do not know." Since research is intended to answer the question being investigated, this phrase may raise some concern to the reader, as initially it did to me. It is at this point that postmodernism comes to the rescue.

Postmodernism suggests that "there is not final knowledge; the contingency and historical moment of all readings means that whatever the object of our gaze, it is contested, temporal and emergent" (Lather, 1991, p. 111). This is good news. Knowing that we do not have to arrive at a final definitive answer to a question permits the freedom to "not know." It elevates the question, leaving it open for others to think about and to explore. It eliminates the either/or position that means if I am right you must be wrong. It allows for a diversity of thinking and a tolerance for ambiguity. I identify with Tamasese and his colleagues (as cited in Pare, 1995) who offer the notion of "preferred meanings," allowing

"that some interpretations, in some contexts, at some times, deserve to be favored" (p. 16). With these parameters in mind I offer my final thoughts.

Review

Although I believe the narratives told by my participants and the interpretations that followed fulfilled the intentions of this study, I feel compelled to make some additional observations. It was my hope to illuminate the experience of adolescents who are cast as the family difficulty without reducing this experience to essences. From each narrative I chose a theme which most cogently encapsulated the experience of that particular youth. Each of these themes is present to some degree in all the stories. By exploring a theme in depth in one narrative, I believe the subjective experience of all the participants is best understood; for example, the theme of "not caring" and then "caring again," so prominent in Noah's story, is part of all the participants' stories. All have felt the hopelessness of changing their identity in family yet all have argued for ascendancy over their designated position.

If I were to make note of one overarching theme, it would be the participants' desire for an end to conflict. The last interview question I asked, the miracle question (Berg 1992), encouraged the participants to envision a time when they would no longer be considered the family difficulty. All participants, including me, painted a picture where relationship difficulties would be solved. Joseph's description of what peace would look like in his family says it all.

All the years of tension . . . Just the look on her face, (the mother) the look on my face. I guess you're both happier, more vibrant and there'd just be more love there. . . .

With both my brothers there are just some days when we can't stand each other but I guess those days would be fewer and far between. Ian sort of thinks he's above me and Mike and he gets better marks and gets along better with my parents but he's not above me, and I'm not above Mike. Everything would be equal. We would just feel equal to each other.

(The father) He'd just look at you - you could see it in his eyes. He would have the biggest smile on his face. The war would be over and he'd be ecstatic about that.

Limitations

The fact that I was looking at individual experience yet stating that my theoretical position came from a systems perspective subjected me to some intense considerations. To a degree, I resolved this dilemma by including a Bowen family systems interpretation in my analysis of the data. For a more complete understanding and an actual systems perspective, the entire family needed to be included. When the family is not included, it is easy to blame the family and exonerate the child, a position to which systems theory does not ascribe. Sadly, working with the whole family was far beyond the constraints of this study.

An issue that caused me considerable thought, was the limiting of my participants' life experience by representing them as a difficulty in family. Gilligan (1993) sees using "explanatory metaphors" such as "damaged child," or, in my case, "a difficulty," as misleading "in that it reduces an entire lifetime of experience to a single frame of reference" (1993, p. 287). The

danger arises that, once a label is affixed to an experience, only those incidents that support this frame of reference will be retained. Earlier in this work, I presented an argument which I hope overcomes this objection, but I cannot be sure how any individual will interpret an experience.

It is absolutely essential that the reader understand that my interpretation of the data is but a cursory explanation of a very complex subject. Scott Peck (1995) says most forcefully that "Anything of any significance is overdetermined. Everything worth thinking about has more than one cause" (p. 9). I would like to acknowledge the complexity of the phenomenon of the focused-on child and admit to my limited understanding of all the factors that must come together for a particular child to become the center of the family's attention.

Implications

The notion that identity is constructed and therefore changeable is held by many (Goolishian & Anderson, 1988; Mahoney, 1988; Neimeyer, 1993; Peavy, 1996; Savickas, 1995) and offers hope to the adolescent caught in the role of the family scapegoat. Parents are free, except in the most extreme circumstances, to say anything they choose to their children. The dysfunctions of one generation can be passed on to the next without protest. Children do not have an objective measure to assess what they hear and, in their early years, must rely entirely upon their parents for information about themselves. They are physically, emotionally, and financially dependent.

As children approach adolescence and other people assume greater importance in their lives, occasions for new input arise. My study indicates that adolescents are interested and willing to discuss their family position. I

believe it would be useful to introduce adolescents to the basic tenants of family systems in small discussion groups. Many groups are already in place in residential group homes. The idea of a family as a system could be broached through the use of a genogram. The genogram provides a visual representation offering adolescents who are developmentally self-focused a larger picture of their family. Creating some perspective may open up an opportunity for them to examine their personal fable (Elkind, 1984) of uniqueness. Family isolation traps the child in a single story, while conversation offers the possibility for the telling of a new story. Making a strong case for storytelling as a promoter of change, Anderson and Goolishian (1988) report that "The realization of change requires communicative action, dialogue, and discourse" (p. 381). Rushdie (as cited in Becvar & Becvar, 1993) writes with substantial insight about the consequences of not being able to change the story that dominates one's life.

Those who do not have the power over the story that dominates their lives, power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts. (p. 147)

It is only when adolescents can challenge the identity bestowed on them in family that they can begin to view themselves differently. The process of differentiating a self from parents means that adolescents must evaluate and divest themselves of unrealistic expectations and negative labels which have worked at defining them in their family.

The task of defining a self apart from family creates anxiety, but without anxiety change does not happen. It is the willingness to examine the ruptures

that construct the crucible providing a place for change to occur. In this place, contradictions between old and new conceptions of reality leave the adolescent with a temporary unstable sense of identity. Even though thoughts of self may have been negative and painful they have served to provide a self-identity. In the following poem Virginia Satir (1976) asks the crucial question about what it means to come out of denial.

In a way
 All things you have done
 Up to the present,
 If you are still around,
 Have worked
 The question again is,
 What is the price
 and
 Could the price be lower . . .
 (vii)

An implication of this inquiry that may not be apparent is my steadfast conviction in the potential for changing one's life by changing one's mind. Norman Vincent Peale author of *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) based much of his writing on the work of William James, who was one of the first to speak about the influence of thinking on behaviour. The mind-body split purported by Decartes and accepted for the past one hundred years no longer holds sway in our postmodern world. Recent medical evidence support this position, noting that memory, once thought to be the sole property of the brain is located within cells in many parts of the body and new thinking actually creates new synapses or connections in the brain (Northrup,

1998) Changing how one thinks about oneself can change the very structure of who we are. The creation of a new identity is both mental and physical.

While accepting that a new identity is possible, I would also like to acknowledge the contribution a former identity makes to the person we become. Davies (as cited in Hoskins, 1998; Chambers, 1998) used the metaphor of a palimpsest to explain the process of change that takes place when a person reconstitutes a self. Scribes, she claims, would use the same parchment again and again, merely erasing what had been written before. Traces of previous writings were always visible. Similarly, when a person recreates a new identity through a different story, remnants of the former story remain. At times an old story will resurface, obliterating a new, more positive story. It is when a story of oppression, such as being the family difficulty, informs a new story of resilience that former negative identities become useful in our present lives.

Looking back at the role I played in family, I am able to see some of the areas of my life that have benefited from the struggles of being designated the family difficulty. The issue is, as always, not what has happened to us in our lives but how we have made meaning of events. The words of Temple Grandin, a person born with the debilitating condition of autism, holds true for me and I would hope for my participants in their future life. "If I could snap my fingers and be nonautistic, I would not - because then I wouldn't be me. Autism is part of who I am" (Sacks, 1995, p. 291).

A Personal Ending

If the behaviour of my thesis group is any indication of what happens after one's thesis is completed, then the process of finishing does not end with the

oral defense. Eugenie continues to bring new articles she had read about research that we all must read. Elizabeth, who wrote about women's artful expression, has renewed her own commitment to expressing herself in art. Maureen, in our discussions about my thesis, reminds me of her similar struggle and the usefulness of what she learned from her inquiry in her new teaching position. Julie, who is in the process of completing her thesis, keeps me connected to a not so long ago time when I believed this work would never be finished.

There is no question that writing a thesis is much more than taking a course or writing a paper. It is not, as some suggest, three or four long papers strung together. I hope I do not sound over dramatic when I say that for the past eight months it has been my life. In our thesis group we often spoke with amazement about how almost everything that happened to us was in some way related to our inquiry. Awakening in the morning my first thoughts were of my thesis task for the day. At night, as I was falling asleep, I often recounted each step of the research process I had completed as a way of encouraging myself to continue. Recently, I read with absorbed interest the story of Andrew Wiles who, after thirty-five years of struggle, solved Fermat's Last Theorem, which for 350 years had been considered the world's greatest mathematical riddle. Just as all roads lead to Rome, I related immediately to his experience of having completed a mammoth undertaking. In making this comparison it may seem to the reader that I am taking the experience of writing a thesis to an extreme length, but to this researcher, the comparison is apt. Like Wiles, I recognize that ending my thesis activities will result in "acute withdrawal symptoms." But also, like Wiles, I acknowledge that "there is a tremendous sense of freedom. (It) is a long time to think about

one thing. This particular odyssey is now over. My mind is at rest"
(Majendie, 1998, p. 3).

References

- Ackerman, N. W. (1958). *The psychodynamics of family life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Anderson, H., & Goolishian, H. (1988). Human systems as linguistic systems: Preliminary and evolving ideas about the implications for clinical theory. *Family Process*, 27(4), 371-393.
- Arvay, M. (1997). *Narratives of secondary traumatic stress: Stories of struggle and hope*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.
- Axline, V. M. (1978). *Play therapy* (15th ed.). New York: Ballantine.
- Baker, C. (1982). The adolescent as theorist: An interpretive view. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 11, 167-181.
- Bank, S. P., & Kahn M. D. (1982). *The sibling bond*. New York: Basic Books.
- Barragan, M. (1976). The child centered family. In P. J. Guerin (Ed.), *Family therapy: Theory and Practice* (pp. 232-248). New York: Gardner.
- Becvar, D. S., & Becvar, R. J. (1993). Storytelling and family therapy. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 21 (2), 145-160.
- Berg, I. K., & Miller, S. D. ((1992). *Working with the problem drinker: A solution-focused approach*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. New York: Doubleday.

Bernier, J. C., & Siegel, D. H. (1994). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A family and ecological systems perspective. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 40, 142-150.

Block, J. (1994). *Family Myths: Living our roles, betraying ourselves*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Bollas, C. (1987). *The shadow of the object: Psychoanalysis of the unthought known*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.

Bradt, J. O., & Moynihan, C. (1971). Opening the safe: A study of child-focused families. In J. Bradt, & C. Moynihan (Eds.). *Systems Therapy* (pp. 1-24). New York: Guilford.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carlsen, M. B. (1988). *Meaning-making: Therapeutic processes in adult development*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Carter, E., & McGoldrick-Orfanidis, M. (1976). Family therapy with one person and the family therapist's own family. *Georgetown Symposia*, 1, 193 - 219.

Chambers, E. (1998). *Beyond the palace arts: The artful expression of women*. Master's Thesis. University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Corsini, R. J., & Wedding D. (1995). *Current psychotherapies*. Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock.

Craik, K., Hogan, R., & Wolfe, R. (1993). *Fifty years of personality psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.

Curran, D. (1983). *Traits of a healthy family*. Minneapolis, MN: Winston.

Daly, K. (1997). Re-placing theory in ethnography: A postmodern view. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 343-365.

Davis B., & Harre, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. 20 (1), 43-63.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. CA: Sage.

Elkind, D. (1984). *All grown up and no place to go: Teenagers in crisis*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Erickson, E. (1968). *Identity, youth, and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Fauber, R. L. & Long, N. (1991). Children in context: The role of the family in child psychotherapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 59, 813-820

Forehand, R., & McMahon, R. J. (1981). *Helping the noncompliant child: A clinician's guide to parent training*. New York: Guilford Press.

Fragar, A. (1985). A family systems perspective on acting-out. *The Journal of Contemporary Social Work*, 66, 167-176.

Framo, J. (1974). Personal reflections of a family therapist. *Georgetown Family Symposia*, 1, 110- 122

Fraser, J. G. (1920). *Scapegoat*. New York: McMillan.

Freeman, D. S. (1991). *The involvement of children in family therapy: When and how*. Unpublished manuscript, University of British Columbia at Vancouver.

Freud, A. (1966). *The ego and the mechanisms of defense*. New York: International Universities Press.

Gergen, K. (1992). Psychology in the postmodern era. *The General Psychologist*, 28(3), 10-14.

Gilbert, R. M. (1991). *Extraordinary relationships: A new way of thinking about human interactions*. Minneapolis: Chronimed.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, S. (1993). Commentary. In S. Gilligan & R. Price (Eds.), *Therapeutic conversations* (pp. 287-290). New York: W. W. Norton.

Goldberg, N. (1990). *Wild mind*. New York: Bantam Books.

Goleman, D. (1985). *Vital lies, simple truths: The psychology of self-deception*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Gordon, C. (1972). Social characteristics of early adolescence. In J. Kagan and R. Coles (Eds.), *Twelve to sixteen: Early adolescence*. New York: W.W. Norton

Guerin, P., & Gordon, E. (1984). Trees, triangles and temperament in the child-centered family. In C. Fishman & B. Rosman (Eds.), *Models For Family Change* (pp. 131-144). New York: Guilford.

Guerin, P., Fogarty, T., Fay, L., & Kautto, J. (1996). *Working with relationship triangles: The one-two-three of psychotherapy*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Haley, J. (1976). *Problem solving therapy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Halpern, E. S. (1983). *Auditing naturalistic inquiries, some preliminary applications. Part I: Development of the process. Part 2: Case study application*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Harding, S. (Ed.). (1987). *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: Basic Books.

Hoskins, M. (1998). *Difficulties with discourse: A metaphorical reading of reconstituting self*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Janesick, V. (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. (pp. 209-219). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (Eds.) (1993). *The narrative study of lives* (Vol. 1). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kazdin, A. E. ((1993). Treatment of conduct disorder: Progress and directions in psychotherapy research. *Development and Psychopathology*, 5, 277-310.

Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kelly, G. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton.

Kerr, M. (1974). The importance of the extended family. *Georgetown Symposia*, 1, 51-61.

Kerr, M. (1988). Some aspects of systems thinking. *Family Center Report*, 9(4), 1-6.

Kerr, M. (1992). Physical illness and the family emotional system: Psoriasis as a model. *Behavioral Medicine*, 18, 101-113.

Kerr, M. E., & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family Evaluation*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Krasner, M. (1989). The adolescent in the child-focused family. *The Family Center Report*, 8-10.

Krieger, S. (1991). *Social science and the self: Personal essays on an art form*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Kuehl, B. (1993). Child and family therapy: A collaborative approach. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 21, 260-266.

Kuhn, A. (1995). *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*. London: Verso.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lang, R. D. (1969). *The politics of the family*. Toronto: Hunter Rose.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within the postmodern*. New York: Routledge.

Lerner, H. G. (1986). Dianna and Little: Can a feminist still like Murray Bowen? *Family Therapy Network*, 9(6), 36-39.

- Lerner, H. G. (1989). *The Dance of Intimacy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lewis, J. M. (1976). *No single thread: Psychological health in family systems*. New York: W. Grunner/Mazel.
- Lopez, B. (1990). *Crow and weasel*. Toronto: Random House
- Mahoney, M. (1991). *Human change processes: The scientific foundations of psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Majendie, P. (1998, September 3). A riddle's tale: 350 years of despair, agony and suicide ended by shy genius. *The Times Colonist*, p. A3.
- Marcia, J. (1987). The identity status approach to the study of ego identity development. In T. Honess & K Yardley (Eds.). *Self and identity: Perspectives across the lifespan*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1989). *Designing Qualitative Research*. California: Sage.
- McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New York: William Morrow and Company.
- McGoldrick & Gerson (1985) *Genograms in family assessment*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- McGoldrick, M., Anderson, D. M., & Walsh, F. (1991). *A Framework for Family Therapy*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Mercer, J. (1991). *To everything there is a season: Development in the context of the life span*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America
- Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Moursund, J. (1993). *The process of counseling and therapy*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Napier, A. Y., & Whitaker, C. A. (1978). *The family crucible*. Harper & Row.

Neimeyer, G. (1993). The challenge of change: Reflections on constructivist psychotherapy. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, 7, (3), 183-194.

Nodding, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Northrup, C. (1998). *Women's bodies, women's wisdom: Creating physical and emotional health and healing*. New York: Bantam Books.

Oberg, A. (1989). *Writing a good qualitative research report*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Victoria.

Oberg, A. (1998, March). *Re-articulating the movement of an inquiry given a postmetaphysical concept of rationality*. Faculty research panel, Faculty of Education, Victoria, British Columbia.

Ochberg, R. (1994). Life stories and storied lives. In A. Lieblich & R. Josselson (Eds.), *Exploring identity and gender: The narrative study of lives* (Vol. 2, pp. 113-144). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Osborne, J. W. (1990). Some basic existential-phenomenological research methodology for counsellors. *Canadian Journal of Counselling* (24), 2, 79-91.

Pare, D. (1995). Of families and other cultures: The shifting paradigm of family therapy. *Family Process*, 34, 1-19.

Parry, A., & Doan, R. E. (1994). *Story re-visions*. New York: The Guilford Press.

- Parry, A. (1991). A universe of stories. *Family Process*, 30, 37-54.
- Peale, N. V. (1952). *The power of positive thinking*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Peavy, R. V. (1996). Counselling as a culture of healing. *Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 24, (1), 141-150
- Peck, M. S. (1995). *In search of stones: A pilgrimage of faith, reason, and discovery*. New York: Hyperion
- Pillari, V. (1991). *Scapegoating in families*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Porter, K. A. (1979). *The collected stories of Katherine Anne Porter*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Richardson, L. (1997). *Constructing an academic life: Fields of play*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sacks, O. (1995). *An anthropologist on mars: Seven paradoxical tales*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Santrock, J. W. (1998). *Adolescence*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill
- Satir, V. (1972). *Peoplemaking*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Satir, V. (1976). *Making contact*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.

Savickas, M. (1995). Constructivist counseling for career indecision. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 43, 363-372.

Schnarch, D. M. (1991). *Constructing the sexual crucible*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Schultz, S. J. (1984). *Family systems thinking*. New Jersey: Jason Aronson.

Sipe, J. W., & Doherty, W. J. (1993). What they don't teach in graduate school: Family systems research in the real world. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 21 (2), 99-109.

Sluzki, D. E. (1990). In Memoriam Murray Bowen (1913-1990). *Family Process*, 29(4), 341.

Spickard, A., & Thompson, B. (1985). *Dying for a Drink: What you should know about alcoholism*. Dallas: Word Publishing.

Spiegel, H., & Linn, L. (1969). The "ripple effect" following adjunct hypnosis in analytic psychotherapy. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 124, 53-58.

Spretnak, C. (1997). *The resurgence of the real: Body, nature, and place in a hypermodern world*. New York: Addison-Wesley.

Stewart, A., Sokol, M., Healy, J., & Chester, N. (1986). Longitudinal studies of psychological consequences of life changes in children and adults. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 143-151.

Stith, S. M., Rosen, K. H., McCollum, E. E., Coleman, J. U., & Herman, S. A. (1996). The voices of children: Preadolescent children's experiences in family therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 22 (1), 69-86.

Sykes, J. (1982). *The concise oxford dictionary of current english* (7th ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Terr, L. (1990). *Too scared to cry*. New York: Basic Books.

Toman, W. (1974). Family constellations; their differentiation and significance in psychotherapy. *Georgetown Family Symposia*, 14-26.

van Manen, M. (1992). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Ontario: Althouse Press.

Watzlawich, P., Bevelas, J. B., & Jackson, D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies and paradoxes*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent

I understand that this research project is part of the requirements for Susanne Gregory's masters' degree in counselling in the Faculty of Education.

I understand that the purpose of this research is to give adolescents an opportunity to express their thoughts about their past and present situation in family. The information from this study will assist those who work with families to act in a more informed and caring way. The title of the project is "The Lived Experience of Being Thought of as a Difficulty in Family."

The total time commitment is three hours. We will meet on two separate occasions for one and a half hours. During this time I will be asked about my understanding of the problems I am experiencing in my family. I am free to say whatever I think is relevant without fear of criticism.

My participation in this study is completely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty and can request that the data be destroyed. If I do not request the destruction of the data the researcher may use it as part of her study. All the information I give will be kept confidential except in cases where by law the researcher is obliged to report ie. when a person is a danger to him/herself or to others.

I understand that Susanne Gregory will make the following arrangements to protect my confidentiality.

1. All data collected will be considered confidential and the tapes and transcripts of the interviews will be kept in separate locked cabinets.

2. Only the principal researcher will have access to the tapes. Once the tapes are transcribed and analyzed they will be erased.

3. My name will not be attached to this study. The researcher will code the written transcripts with numerical identifiers to identify results obtained from individual participants. Only The researcher and perhaps the three members of her committee if necessary, will read the coded written transcripts. The purpose of the committee members' examination of the transcripts will be to clarify research findings.

4. In any published results (eg. conferences, articles) my anonymity will be further protected by using a code name to identify spoken or written text.

5. The transcribed data will be destroyed as soon as the researcher has received acceptance of her thesis, or within 5 years,, whichever occurs first.

If I have any questions or concerns regarding this study I may contact Susanne Gregory at 598-2256, Dr. Geoff Hett at 721-7783, or Dr. Sibylle Artz at 721-1642.

Date _____

Signature _____

Partial Copyright License

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis:

STORIES THAT TAKE CARE OF US

A Study of Adolescents Cast as a Family Difficulty

Author_

Susanne Gregory



Vita

Surname: Gregory

Given Names: Susanne Catherine

Place of Birth: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria
1993-1998

University of British Columbia
1964-1969

Degrees Awarded

B. Ed.	University of British Columbia	1969
--------	--------------------------------	------