

**PAST EXPERIENCE, PRESENT DISCOVERIES, FUTURE HOPE:
A JOURNEY FOR FATHERS**

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Dedication

To my son, John:

Who continues to teach me there is always more to learn and reminds me daily how much fun it is to be a mom.

To my mother, Elsie MacLean:

Who did not live long enough to see this thesis completed but whose encouragement I felt through my journey.

Abstract

The father's role in families where there has been domestic violence is now known to have significant impact on future intergenerational abuse (Dutton, 1998). Fathers who shame and physically abuse their sons are putting these young boys at risk for becoming potential abusers. However, even though this risk factor is known, the literature review conducted through this study shows the absence of information on the father/child relationship. Also absent was a knowledge on parenting groups available for these men. In attempting to address this gap in the research and to gain a better understanding of how these fathers experienced the parenting group, I realized I first needed to understand how these men experienced their lives. Using interpretive inquiry, three men were interviewed about their understanding of their life experiences. The men chosen for the research had a history of domestic abuse within the family. Data collection included observations made during the parenting group, profiles gathered from intake files, and transcripts from the interviews. The data were analyzed for themes, patterns, confirmations, and contradictions, and then interpreted to reconstruct the men's stories. The findings of the study indicate several topics common to all three men: custody, visitation, the role of the father, emotional functioning, and past and present relationships. Interwoven among the topics were the themes of inefficacy, personal care, emotional nurturance and attachment, and awareness of the way they use language. Their stories echo the same message: they love their children and want to be with them.

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Table of Contents

Dedication iii

Abstract iv

Acknowledgements v

Table of Contents vi

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION 1

 Background to the Study 3

 Rationale for the Study 4

 Purpose of the Study 8

 Significance of the Study 9

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW 10

 Overview of Family Violence 10

 Definition of Family Violence 11

 Historical Context 12

 Theories of Wife Abuse 13

 Psychological Theories 13

 Sociological Theories 15

 Characteristics of the Family 16

 Family of Origin 17

 Effects on Children Who Witness Family Violence 18

 The Abusive Personality 22

 Treatment Programs 25

 Parenting Groups 26

 Summary 28

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY 30

Interpretive Inquiry	33
Key Themes in Hermeneutics	34
The Fore-Structure of Interpretation	35
The Hermeneutic Circle	36
Qualitative Case Study	37
Narrative Inquiry	39
Interviewing	41
Observations	43
Procedures	44
Site and Participants	45
Ethical Considerations	46
Data Collection	47
Analysis	54
Evaluating the Study	58
Reflections on the Research Process	60
Summary	62
 Chapter 4. NARRATIVE PORTRAITS	 64
Jordan's Story	64
Jeff's Story	67
Mike's Story	69
 Chapter 5. THE JOURNEY	 73
 Chapter 6. THEIR GROUP EXPERIENCE	 76
Introduction	76
Intake Information	77
Perceptions	78
Empathy	80
Age and Stage Development	81

Family Roles	82
Play	83
Punishment and Discipline	84
Punishment and Shame	86
Punishment, Anger, and Responsibility	87
Punishment and Rewards	89
Parent/Child Reflection	89
Closing	90
Summary	91
 Chapter 7. TOPICS	 92
Early Childhood Experiences	93
Present Relationship With Their Parents	94
Parenting Skills	95
Emotional Functioning	95
Relationship With Father	96
Relationship With Mother	96
The Present	97
Visiting Their Children	98
Their Role as Father	102
Their Relationships With Their Children	104
Children in the Crossfire	106
Summary	107
 Chapter 8. THEMES	 109
Inefficacy	109
Inefficacy in Childhood	110
Inefficacy in Present Relationships	110
Inefficacy in Future Relationships	111
Emotional Nurturance	112

Emotional Attachment 112

 The Children’s Emotional Attachment 113

Personal Growth 113

Self-Care 114

Awareness of the Way They Use Language 114

Language in the Larger Context 116

Uncoverings 116

Summary 117

Chapter 9. MY JOURNEY 118

Chapter 10. DISCUSSION 123

 Integration of the Findings with the Current Literature 123

 Men’s Resistance 124

 The Role of the Father 125

 Custody and Visitation 128

 The Change Process 130

 Limitations of the Study 133

 Implications for Treatment 134

 Implications for Research 135

References 137

Appendix A: LETTER OF INFORMATION 146

Appendix B: CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION 148

Appendix C: THE MEN’S PARENTING GROUP 149

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about." . . . "When I was beaten, I deserved it." . . . "Kids need to be controlled." . . . "You'll never amount to anything." . . . "What a pathetic excuse for a man." . . . "What did I do to deserve you?"

These are some of the words used in stories I have heard from members of the Men's Parenting Group. Words spoken in a group reveal a lot about a person and his or her beliefs, background, and future. Words are spoken as though abuse is or was normal: "This is the way things are." Children learn how to communicate at a very early age from listening to and watching the significant adults, mainly parents, in their lives. Children discover who they are by the way their parents interact with them, give them love and affection, and encourage them to succeed. Glasser (1986) once stated that children discover who they are by the reflection they see in their parents' eyes. For many of these men this mirror has not shown a happy reflection. The stories shared were often their own histories of abuse that at the beginning of group was minimized and considered amusing.

After 3 years of facilitating men's parenting groups, I became aware of the stories the men revealed throughout the 12 weeks of group meetings. Their stories appeared to be such an integral part of their lives: "Kids need to be controlled and since that's my job, I'll make sure they don't get away with nothin'; just like my old man did to me."

There seemed to be a commonality among group members in the language they used to describe their stories. Beliefs and values appeared integrated within the words of their stories: "My old man only beat me when I deserved it. It didn't hurt me, just made

me tough.” They talked about hearing words that described who they were from a very early age: “You’ll never amount to anything, you’re just no good.” But their stories revealed their inability to make connections between these early words and their present lives. There seemed to be a great deal of emphasis on the words from their fathers: “It didn’t matter how hard I tried, it was just a matter of time before I would get it [the belt, hand, strap].” The men didn’t appear to remember the feelings associated with the abuse and humiliation, and therefore are not now able to empathize with the feelings of their own children (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990).

After the third week of the parenting group their stories were changing, their language seemed more hesitant: “I’m the strength in my family, I guess that’s good.” Each week they revealed more of their individual stories and they began to question and connect their childhood experiences with their lives now: “My old man wouldn’t let me cry after I was six: I haven’t cried since. Maybe that’s why I laughed when I broke my hip. I just couldn’t stop laughing on the way to the hospital.”

This study will focus on the journeys of the men attending a 12-week parenting program and how their own stories reveal the changes that are happening along the way.

Background to the Study

The YWCA Sheriff King Family Support Centre believes in a holistic approach when working with families. Therefore, group counselling is provided for men, women, and children who have been in abusive situations. The agency also believes that abuse is a learned behaviour and that group members can learn healthy alternatives to handle conflict.

The Men’s Parenting Program began at the Sheriff King Family Support Centre in 1995 at the request of a man who was in his final phase of treatment for abusive men. He

identified a need especially for a men's parenting group as he felt parenting had not been discussed enough in treatment, and he also expressed a lack of comfort in a coed group for fear of being shamed about his inadequate parenting skills.

The first group had seven men in attendance on the first evening, with five men completing the program. Initially, all the men had attended the men's treatment program. As the groups continued, men were referred from Child Welfare, the legal system, and other agencies throughout the city.

The parenting program follows the philosophy and principles of the Sheriff King Family Support Centre. The men attend the parenting program for 2½ hours per week and for a period of 12 weeks. During the past 3 years various topics have been presented to the members. A common thread throughout the material is the emphasis on Adlerian theory using the work of Lott and Nelson (1995) and Glenn (1990). This theory promotes the belief that all human beings need to feel capable, significant and have a sense of personal power. There is a strong component of experiential activities in the program adapted from Teaching Parenting, the Positive Discipline Way (Lott & Nelson, 1995). The group has been offered twice a year for the past 4 years.

Rationale for the Study

"Thank God men aren't more involved in child rearing! Child molesting and battering rates are bad enough already. Imagine what it would be like if they spent as much time with kids as women do?" (Miedzian, 1991, p. 101). This comment was made by a woman who heard Myriam Miedzian, author of the book titled Boys Will Be Boys, speak about child rearing and fathers. Is this attitude persistent in today's society, or just a comment from one person? Unfortunately, my experience with Child Welfare and the legal system indicates a very similar attitude, where the perception is that mothers make

better caregivers than fathers, thus assuming that the care of a father would be inferior to that of a mother. What is even more frightening is that this comment was said about men in general. What would have been said about men who have abused their partners or children? A few years ago, a university law professor commented that once a man had abused, there was little that could be done to help him (L. Olson, personal communication, 1994). "Once an abuser, always an abuser," and in domestic abuse situations, children are always better off with their mother than their father. This is usually the case even if the children have a good relationship with their father. Nevertheless, the family unit is disrupted when Dad is no longer there, and often the children feel responsible. It is important to note that this observation does not exclude men from the need to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour toward their partners.

Children who live in homes with domestic violence not only witness violence between their parents, but often get caught in the crossfire trying to prevent their moms from getting hurt (Jaffe et al., 1990). In Alberta, domestic abuse falls under the Child Welfare Act which considers children to be abused when they witness domestic violence. After searching for programs and literature on fathers who have been abusive to their partners and are therefore abusing their children, I became quite concerned about the lack of attention given to this particular population. If society perceives men as unable to be nurturing parents, and abusive men as unable to change, what does the future hold for their children?

Even though my search for parenting programs for men proved almost futile, I did discover a number of books for men dealing with "the absent father" or how to resolve childhood issues from having an absentee father. In his book titled Cracking the Armour, Kaufman (1994) writes the responses of a middle-aged man asked about his father: "I

have no real image of him,” “Wow, I never thought of that,” “He wasn’t there a lot,” “I know he was strong and fair, but nothing really comes to mind” (p. 88). In his book titled Wrestling with Love, Osherson (1992) notes:

Fathers are the first men in our lives, and our first and strongest vision of masculinity. Sons look to fathers for affirmation, for information, and as reliable allies in the struggle to come to terms with mothers. Our identities as men are often tied to a sense of shame, anger or grief about what happened between our fathers and ourselves, and the way we confront opportunities as fathers, husbands, friends, and workers is often pegged to the relationship with this first man in our life. (p. 255)

If a young boy’s relationship with his father plays such an important role in his adult life, why do we first not acknowledge this, and then why do we expect the process to miraculously happen without any help?

In my search for men’s parenting programs, I was only able to connect with one program--from Minnesota. This program was offered to men who were currently dealing with issues related to the abuse of their partners. Unfortunately, the program is no longer being offered through the Duluth center and is only available for clients who have the resources to attend (D. Mathews, personal communication, May, 1997). At conferences where I have been asked to present on the Men’s Parenting Program, I am usually inundated with requests for further information and research results as many clinicians in this area feel the need to offer more programs for abusive men on the subject of parenting.

In the past 3 years, I have facilitated Men’s Parenting Programs, and have heard stories from the group members about their own experiences of abuse at the hands of

their fathers. These fathers were not only emotionally absent, but were angry and abusive toward their sons. What role does an abusive father play in intergenerational violence? According to Osherson (1992), “Fathers who are abusive or angry can leave their sons quick to anger when vulnerable out of a misidentification with the father’s rejection and rage” (p. 257).

Donald Dutton, a prominent researcher of abusive men in British Columbia, has found through his studies that there are three factors that put young boys at risk for becoming abusive in their intimate adult relationships. His research has shown a boy who experiences shame and punishment from his father and an insecure attachment from his mother has a very high risk for becoming abusive as an adult. In his book titled The Batterer, Dutton (1994) states:

Punishing a child at random is equally pernicious. The boy cannot determine what specifically he has done wrong to deserve the punishment. The effect is to generalize the “wrongness” to the whole self. The shaming aspect of punishment runs deep and conveys a lingering message that the boy is repulsive, contemptible and unlovable in a global sense. By obscuring the connection between behaviour and castigation, the randomly shaming and punishing father attacks the boy’s identity. (p. 85)

During the course of the men’s parenting group, participants would disclose little by little the abuse and shame they had endured as children. Ironically, at the beginning, many men had trouble identifying the abusive behaviour by their fathers and felt it was justified. Dutton (1994) also found that men in his programs minimized the abuse. They describe their fathers as “stern” or “strict.” They say: “Dad had a bad temper sometimes,” or “He wasn’t around much” (p. 87). I would often hear these typical

comments: “I deserved it,” or “Somebody had to be in control.” Group members often identify the control as strength and believe that someone had to make the children listen. If fathers play such an important role in their sons’ lives, should there not be programs to help them?

Miedzian (1991) stresses the need for co-parenting to effect a fundamental and long-lasting change with respect to violence. “As co-parenting increasingly becomes the norm, male behaviour will change. Empathy, emotional connectedness, concern for others will come to be accepted as acceptable masculine qualities. This will lead to a significant decrease in men battering their wives and children” (p. 99). Some people parent the way they were parented and for the men in these parenting groups, healthy parenting strategies were not demonstrated. Unless there are programs available to show different parenting styles and their effects, change will not be possible.

One group member commented after learning about giving children choices: “I didn’t know there was any other way to parent except to hit.” Murray Straus stated at a workshop I attended: “If parents would stop spanking their children it would be one of the most important steps that could be taken in a quest for a less violent world” (M. Straus, personal communication, 1996). These men cannot change their parenting styles unless provided with alternatives.

Violence is a serious problem in today’s society (Jaffe et al., 1990; Miedzian, 1991). As the literature has shown, a father’s role has direct impact in stopping this intergenerational cycle of abuse. The stories shared by the men in the group confirm this fact. The hurt and humiliation children suffer because of a father’s lack of parenting skills can be devastating. Providing men with a safe and trusting environment in which to learn about themselves and new ways to parent can help to stop future generations

from suffering this abuse. As one father stated at the end of group: “Now when something happens I have to stop and think, what do I do now? I didn’t have to think when I hit. This is harder--but now I don’t see the fear in my son’s eyes.”

Purpose of the Study

Power and privilege, often unearned, have been assigned to men in our society, making it very difficult for them to give up what might be termed an invisible sense of entitlement. This inequity of power can deter these men from both the acceptance of responsibility for abusive behaviours and from the effort to make necessary changes. Individual motivation for change combined with group and individual therapy can produce significant positive change in the behaviour of abusive men.

Initially the purpose of this study was to understand the participants’ experiences as they attended the Men’s Parenting Group. I realized in order to understand their group experience I needed to gain a better understanding of how they experience their lives. Therefore the purpose of this study is to advance my understanding of how selected group participants make sense or give meaning to their life experiences as they embark on a journey of connecting their past, present, and future.

Significance of the Study

I believe this study is significant for the following three reasons: (a) To my knowledge this is the first research of its kind in the area of family violence, (b) I believe that new knowledge and better understanding of the father’s role will result in parenting groups becoming part of treatment programs, and (c) this study adds to the existing body of knowledge around family violence and will stimulate further research.

Eighty-one women were murdered in Canada in 1996, and the police were called to 3312 domestic abuse incidents in Calgary in 1997 (C. Houston, personal

communication, January, 1998). The statistics for domestic violence are staggering. I believe that the results of this study will assist with the prevention of family violence in future generations.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dear Dad, I love you and respect you very much. When I was young, you wanted me to be tough. Well, I am and I'm also a wife abuser. I wanted to be just like you and be the man of the house. I found, as well as you, times have changed. Women want to be treated equal and I can't blame them. I'm not as abusive to my kids as you were to me, but I've put them through hell. Well, Dad I forgive you for anything you might have done in my childhood. You did what you thought was right. Dad, this is my last chance for a family life. I screwed up lots before. Wish me well. (Jaffe et al., 1990, pp. 25-26)

Overview of Family Violence

The numbers of men, women, and children affected by family violence are too high. Past studies report that at least 1 in 10 women is abused every year in a domestic violence dispute (MacLeod, 1987). Three to five children in a classroom have witnessed their fathers physically abuse their mothers (Kincaid, 1982; cited in Jaffe et al., 1990). Statistics Canada (1993) reports that 1 in 4 women has been physically abused in a current or past marriage or common-law relationship.

Research shows that the origins of abusive behaviour are linked to a variety of phenomena. In order to provide an overview, the literature is examined in the following areas: (a) definition of family violence, (b) historical context, (c) theories of wife abuse, (d) characteristics of the family, (e) family of origin, (f) effects on children who witness family violence, (g) the abusive personality, and (h) treatment programs. The literature review will end with a description of parenting groups.

Definition of Family Violence

What is family violence? The literature refers to family violence under a variety of names. Terms such as domestic abuse, marital violence, and spousal abuse are often used interchangeably. The variety of terms often leads to confusion and controversy regarding meaning and implication. When people hear the phrase “family violence,” images of a woman covered with bruises often come to mind, therefore providing an escape door for the man who emotionally abuses his partner.

Lenore Walker, a well-known author in the literature of battered women, writes: “A battered woman is a woman who is repeatedly subjected to any forceful physical or psychological behaviour by a man in order to coerce her to do what he wants her to do, without any concerns for her rights” (1979, p. 15). Newer definitions such as the following by the Calgary Domestic Violence Committee address more of the issues around power and control:

Domestic abuse is the attempt, act or intent of someone in a personal relationship to intimidate either by threat or by the use of physical force on another person or property. The purpose of the abuse is to control and/or exploit through intimidation, inducement of fear or by inflicting pain. Abusive behaviour can have many forms including: verbal, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, economic and violation of rights. All forms of abusive behaviour are ways in which one human being is trying to have control and/or exploit or have power over another. (S. Blakely, personal communication, November, 1997)

A comparison of the above definitions to the next section reveals that the definition of family violence has evolved over time to become more inclusive of all forms of abuse.

Historical Context

For the last 20 years, there has been a growing awareness of domestic abuse. This topic, once considered a family secret, has slowly come out of hiding, letting society know the alarming rate at which it is occurring. In the 1800s it was perfectly acceptable for a man to beat his wife, children, and servant, as long as the stick he used was no wider than the width of his thumb, hence the saying “the rule of thumb” (Gelles, 1987; Gelles & Cornell, 1990). This law remained on the books in the 1970s. Mulligan (1991) informs the reader that North American laws were greatly influenced by British common law, and retained the right and obligation of husbands to discipline their wives.

According to Andersen (1988), eighteenth-century French law restricted violence against wives to “blows,” “thumps,” “kicks,” or “punches on the back” provided they left no traces, and the use of sharp-edged or crushing instruments was not allowed (p. 170). Walker (1979) describes in her book, titled The Battered Woman, the man who told a court judge that it was his right to beat his wife when she did not behave. This attitude is still pervasive in today’s society and is often presented in the form of the joke: “I beat her once a day whether she needs it or not.”

Family violence was first addressed in the 1870s by the social agency, The Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Gordon, 1988). Concern about child abuse was paramount in the 1960s and widened to include wife beating, incest, and marital rape (Gordon, 1988). The women’s movement lies at the forefront of bringing the issue of family violence to public awareness. As a result shelters were built to provide safe places for women and children when fleeing an abusive partner. In August 1982, the Criminal Code of Canada was amended to offer women and children more rights than ever before. Bill C-127 set out a list of offences against the person, so that harming a person in any

way is considered a criminal offence and is punishable by imprisonment (Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1986).

Research often focussed on the number of women being abused. In recent years research has developed several theories of wife abuse with the intention of understanding it and ways to alleviate the problem.

Theories of Wife Abuse

Lately considerable research has been directed toward attempting to understand, and hence alleviate, the problem of wife assault. Studies have been undertaken within a variety of disciplines, each guided by a distinct theoretical perspective. Theories pertaining to causation of wife assault are classified as either psychological or sociological (Jenkins, 1990; Russell, 1988). Theories that fall under the psychological analysis include psychoanalytic theory, family systems theory, and social learning theory. Sociological theories that attempt to explain wife abuse include sociocultural theory and feminist theory (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Gondolf, 1985; Jenkins, 1990; Russell, 1988). As an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will provide an overview of these theories.

Psychological Theories

Psychoanalytic theory. This model focuses on the “abuser’s personality traits developed in early formative years, as psychiatric disorders that predisposed individuals to violence” (Russell, 1988, p. 195). According to Gelles and Cornell (1990), this model links such factors as mental illness, personality defects, psychopathology, sociopathology, alcohol and drug misuse, or other intra-individual abnormalities to family violence. Proponents of this theory depict men who batter as being fearful and hateful toward women as a result of their child rearing (Gondolf, 1985).

Family systems theory. This theory explains the use of violence as an interactional process resulting from the need to maintain homeostasis (Jenkins, 1990; Russell, 1988). Systems theory posits that violent families demonstrate certain common characteristics which include:

- a) they are closed systems
 - b) tight boundaries exist between the family and the outside world
 - c) they have strong inflexible family rules
 - d) family roles are unclear
 - e) they have difficulty in setting limits
 - f) communication is dysfunctional
 - g) there is difficulty in separating from families of origin
 - h) there is an overadequate wife/underadequate husband
 - i) they use violence to regulate the closeness-distance theme in the relationship
- (Jenkins, 1990; Russell, 1988).

Social learning theory. There has been a relatively consistent finding that men who abuse their wives and women who are victims of wife abuse are more likely than comparison groups to have witnessed or experienced violence in the families in which they grew up (Jaffe et al., 1990; Roy, 1977). Social learning theory views violence as a learned behaviour rather than psychopathology or character defect (Russell, 1988). Abusive behaviour is believed to be passed along in families from generation to generation, each generation learning about abuse by participating in an abusive family (Gondolf, 1985). Jenkins (1990) writes, "Psychological mechanisms such as modelling and reinforcement of violent behavior are seen to mediate this learning" (p. 28). Lewis (1987) found that men who batter were more likely to have been abused as children, to

have witnessed their father beating their mother, and to have been disciplined as a child with corporal punishment than men in a comparison group.

Sociological Theories

Sociocultural theory. Jenkins (1990) writes, “the organization of families in modern society is described as conflict-ridden and social stresses such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, isolation and overcrowding are seen to predispose individuals to abusive behaviors” (p. 30). Jenkins argues that violence and abusive behaviour are seen to be supported, sanctioned, and institutionalized in the family and society. Gelles and Cornell (1990) support this claim as they argue that phrases such as “spare the rod and spoil the child” and “the marriage licence is a hitting licence” underscore the widespread social approval for the use of force and violence in the home.

Feminist theory. The feminist theory holds that, due to patriarchy, violence against women exists because it gives men power over women, keeping them feeling dependent and inferior (Brinkerhoff & Lupri, 1988). According to Jenkins (1990), gender-based inequalities of power, privilege, and status within society and the family as a cause of male abuse has been extensively focussed on by feminist theory. Pressman (1989) believes abuse occurs against those who are weak or are perceived as weak. She writes, “Women [being] perceived as weak results from the hierarchical structure of our society whereby it is deemed right and appropriate for a wife to be subordinate to her husband” (p. 28). She further argues that this principle which has been endorsed and legitimized by all social institutions lays the foundation for the necessary and acceptable enforcement of this principle.

In summary, the individual, systemic, and social explanations of wife abuse presented above are not offered as mutually exclusive “realities” but rather as a representation of the broad, multi-variable complexity of the problem of wife abuse. As already stated, family violence is a complex issue impacting not only the women who are abused, but all family members.

Characteristics of the Family

Domestic violence impacts all members of the family. Research shows that each person is debilitated in some manner by witnessing or experiencing family violence (Jaffe et al., 1990). Walker (1979) developed a cycle of violence to help understand the women’s experience. The battering cycle seems to have three phases: (a) tension building, (b) the abuse, and (c) the honeymoon phase. In the tension phase, often described by clients as “walking on eggshells,” the husband is hostile and nothing seems to please him, even though his wife attempts to placate him. The tension continues to build and without intervention the abuse phase occurs. After the tension has been released, the family enters the honeymoon stage where everything appears rosy and promises are made that the abuse will never happen again. This phase often holds the family together with the dream that this is the way it could be (Walker, 1979).

Along with the cycle of violence, Walker (1979) has applied the theory of learned helplessness to the battered woman:

Repeated battering, like electric shocks, diminish the motivation to respond. She becomes passive. Secondly, her cognitive ability to perceive success is changed. She does not perceive her response will result in a favourable outcome, whether or not it might . . . she cannot think of alternatives. Finally, her sense of emotional well-being becomes precarious. (pp. 49-50)

Members within a normal family usually function interdependently, respecting each others' boundaries. These families typically engage in family activities, and have specific family rituals which help identify them as family unit. Families where there has been family violence often struggle with the concept of family. Each member adopts a specific role and coping skills in order to survive the abuse.

One reason for such separate roles may be the sexual stereotyping that often occurs in families where there has been domestic abuse. Very rigid roles around being female and male and behaviours associated with these roles are common in these families. The expectation for children is also to adhere to these roles. Little boys are expected to be tough, be a man, while little girls are taught to be caregivers and to make sure everyone's needs are being met (Walker, 1979). Unfortunately, the sexual stereotyping has mostly to do with the inequity of power and control; men are perceived as having the power and women have none. Men who abuse often came from very traditional families, the next area to be discussed.

Family of Origin

There has been sufficient research done in the area of family violence to determine a link between the batterers' families of origin and their behaviour as adults. Interviews with men who are abusive consistently point to experiences of witnessing domestic abuse and being abused themselves (Dutton, 1988). From these experiences children learn that violence is a way to resolve conflict.

Dutton's (1994, 1998) research has identified the family of origin as a major factor in determining whether a male child will become an abusive adult. If a male child experiences shame and physical abuse from his father and has developed an insecure attachment with his mother then he is at very high risk for abusing his intimate partner.

Even though some women who are in an abusive relationship witnessed or experienced abuse as a child, Roy (1977) found that 80% of men that abuse their wives and 30% of women who were abused experienced or witnessed abuse as children.

Jaffe et al. (1990) found that children in violent homes learn the following: that (a) violence is an appropriate form of conflict resolution, (b) violence has its place within the family, (c) when violence is reported outside the family context, there is little or no impact, (d) sexism is encouraged as an inequality of power within the relationship, and (e) violence is an appropriate way to manage stress. Violence is a behaviour learned early in childhood. Children living in violent homes are often caught in the crossfire.

Effects on Children Who Witness Family Violence

A six-year-old little girl, Janie, is staying with her mother in a shelter for battered women. Janie has just thrown her drawing in the waste basket. The shelter children's counsellor retrieves the drawing, smooths it out and asks Janie to tell her about it. Janie says that it is a picture of a little girl drowning. The counsellor suggests that they try to save the little girl by rowing a boat and throwing her a rope or a buoy. Janie tells the counsellor that they can't save her, because no one can see her. (Rossman, 1998, p. 233)

This excerpt illustrates the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness many children living in a violent home experience on a daily basis. Until recently, children who were exposed to family violence were not considered to be substantially impacted by that violence. Nor were they considered prime candidates for protected intervention. Recent research has begun to shed light on the severe psychological, emotional, and behavioural effect on children who have been exposed to this type of environment. It is

also now recognized that exposure often impacts children's social and academic development (Jaffe et al., 1990; Peled & Edleson, 1995; Rossman, 1998).

Children exposed to family violence may exhibit a variety of internalizing and externalizing emotional and behavioural problems (Jaffe et al., 1990; Jaffe & Geffner, 1998). Internalized problems such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and withdrawn behaviour are often noted in exposed children. Other children may complain of somatic problems such as pains in their stomach, headaches, and other bodily pains that have no apparent medical explanation. Externalized problems may include acting out behaviours, aggression with peers, or noncompliant behaviour.

Often children living with family violence live in fear for their lives. Recent studies have estimated that 70% of children who witness woman abuse are also physically abused (Jaffe et al., 1990; Jaffe & Geffner, 1998). These children are also 12 to 14 times more likely to be sexually abused (Emery & Lauman-Billings, 1998). Death threats against mothers by their male partners often contribute to children living in constant fear and anxiety. The very persons in these children's lives who are supposed to protect them may be the most dangerous to them (Gelles & Strauss, 1979; Jaffe et al., 1990; Jaffe & Geffner, 1998). Many parents believe that their children do not witness and are not aware of that violence. In reality, research shows that 80% to 90% of children indicate the opposite (Jaffe et al., 1990; Jaffe & Geffner, 1998).

Recent studies have shown that exposure to ongoing women abuse or threat of serious injury or death may contribute to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in children. Children's responses may involve acute fear, helplessness, or horror; or they may display agitated or disorganized behaviour. In addition, the event may be re-experienced through nightmares or cues that remind the child of the event: for

example, a smell, a certain colour vehicle, or hearing a piece of music. The child may also experience persistent symptoms of increased arousal, such as difficulty falling asleep, irritability, outbursts of anger, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response (Perry, 1996). Lehmann (1997) found that 56% of a sample of children in women's shelters met the full criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, while the majority of the remaining children showed some symptoms associated with this disorder.

The more recent research on trauma suggests that exposure to violence leads to the impairment of brain development (Perry, 1996). Children living in constant fear characterized by unpredictability and danger develop brains that are hypervigilant and focussed on non-verbal cues related to the threat. "These children are in a persisting state of arousal and, therefore, experience persisting anxiety" (Perry, p. 4). Even though this state of arousal may be beneficial to the child during the threat of danger, it does not help the child when the environment changes.

Another common finding is that exposure to abuse interrupts the developmental cycle of the child so that development cannot be achieved as it might in children who come from stable, safe environments (Jaffe et al., 1990). This disruption will be exhibited through a number of different behaviours and in a variety of ways and have long-lasting implications on the individual's psychological well-being and quest for self-actualization.

Children who witness family violence often become aggressive with siblings, peers, and teachers. They can be noncompliant and rebellious. Destruction of property and a tendency to resolve conflict through violence becomes more pronounced as the child enters his/her adolescence. In fact, serious behavioural problems are 17 times more

likely for boys and 10 times more likely for girls living in violent homes (Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985). Statistics about crime among youth further add to this body of literature: "A very high proportion of youth and adults who have been involved in criminal activity have a history which includes abuse or exposure to abuse in the home" (National Crime Prevention Council, 1996, p. 6). This aggressive behaviour is often carried into adulthood where, according to Roy (1977), 80% of men who abuse their partners were abused as children.

Other studies have shown that children who witness wife abuse are frequently hampered in their social and school development (Pepler & Moore, cited in Rossman, 1998). Children who are witnessing violence or who have done so in the past may be preoccupied with the violent episodes and have difficulty concentrating on school learning tasks (Rossman, 1998). They may experience an inability to bring order to their daily lives because of their chaotic environment. This, in turn, influences their capability of developing sequential memory and ordinal positioning. Children living in violence have trouble building an internal locus of control which can result in both a lack of motivation and perseverance in completing academic tasks. As well, these children struggle with developing a sense of self and therefore are unable to use the metacognitive skill of making good choices (Jaffe et al., 1990).

Their social development is also hampered because they are too sad, anxious, or preoccupied to participate, or their tendency to use aggressive strategies in interpersonal problem solving may make them unpopular and rejected (Jaffe et al., 1990). In most of these homes, the children's feelings are not accepted and they can even be ridiculed. Eventually children are unable to properly identify their feelings and are unable to act on

them. This also leads to their inability to get their needs met; they usually become more concerned about meeting the needs of others (Jaffe et al., 1990).

In summary, exposure to family violence can be described as an attack on the child's sense of self which severely impacts on a child's capacity to grow and learn (Garbarino, cited in Peled & Davis, 1995). If 80% of young boys are a risk for becoming abusive as adults what does that tell us about the abusive personality? How are they different from other men? Is there a specific abusive personality? The next section of the paper will explore the answers to these questions.

The Abusive Personality

First, he told Nicole not to see guys or have them in the house, even if they were just friends; second, he made her sneak cigarettes, making her feel bad about herself . . . ; third, he told her she couldn't go out dancing with her girlfriends unless he was out of town, or spend too much time with them; fourth, he convinced our men to control their women and keep them at home more, thereby effectively isolating Nicole; and fifth, he started trying to control Nicole's family again by throwing them financial rewards. (Resick et al., 1994, cited in Dutton, 1994, p. 23)

To the world O. J. Simpson was a hero; to his family he was a man to be feared. How could one man have such different personalities: a kind, gentle one he presented to the public, a cruel abusive one he presented to his family? Many abusive men seem so normal, functioning like anyone else in public, able to contain the rage inside them until they return home to unleash it upon their wives and children.

Donald Dutton has spent 16 years conducting research and providing therapy for men who have been abusive to their partners. Are all batterers alike? According to Dutton's (1994) research, there are three distinct abusive personalities.

Psychopathic wife abusers may often be difficult to detect. They may present as charming and likable, but with close attention a subtle coldness can be noticed. They usually have a criminal record and show no remorse for any of their illegal activities. Robert Hare, who has studied psychopaths for more than 20 years, has noted that while they do engage in criminal activities, they also have a more central and psychological defining feature: a lack of emotional responsiveness that sets them apart from other criminals (Hare, 1993, cited in Dutton, 1994). Hare describes these men as not having the ability to feel another's pain and fear, or the consequences following the abuse, therefore they are poor candidates for treatment (Dutton, 1994).

Over-controlled wife abusers make up approximately 30% of men who abuse their partners (Dutton, 1994). According to his research, these men seem somewhat distant from their feelings and have a tendency to be passive-aggressive. They can be either extremely controlling, and perfectionist, or emotionally distant from their partners. They often score high on dominance/isolation and emotional abuse measures. These men often have very strong opinions around sex roles, not doing household chores, and often engage in verbal attacks on their partners.

Through his research, Dutton (1994) found a great many abusive men fit the cyclical/emotionally volatile personality. These men appear to have a great deal of difficulty expressing their feelings and a strong need to control intimacy. Dutton discovered that the cyclical/volatile abuser experiences a variety of feelings, including rage and jealousy and holds his partner accountable for his feelings of incompetence.

These men often present having two personalities, one they show to the public and one they show to their families. According to Dutton there is a connection between the cycle of violence and the cyclical personality.

Many of the partners of men with cyclical personalities describe them as being on an emotional roller coaster. The ride is similar to the cycle of violence: feelings of irritability during the tension phase, anger and rage during the abuse phase, and remorse during the honeymoon phase. Much of the rage happens as a result of the man fearing abandonment by his partner. The abuser desperately needs his wife to define himself and the thought of being alone is terrifying (Dutton, 1994). The abuse phase is a way for the man to release the tension building inside him and so the cycle continues. The cyclical personality is formed during the abuser's childhood. These men usually had fathers who used physical punishment.

Shame inflicted on the child by his father is also a factor in these men's lives. "Shame is an emotional response to an attack on the global sense of self. When we are shamed our very sense of who we are is threatened" (Dutton, 1994, p. 83). He goes on to say: "If I had to pick a single parental action that generated abusiveness in men, I would say it is being shamed by their fathers" (p. 83). When a child is publicly humiliated, it causes a great deal of discomfort. Lenore Terr, in her book titled Too Scared to Cry, states "shame comes from public exposure of one's vulnerability" (1990, p. 113). The power of shame is best shown in a quotation from Van der Kolk (cited in Dutton, 1994):

The impact of experiences such as violence between parents, angry divorce, rejection and shaming can take a toll on every part of the child, from his self-concept, to his ability to self-soothe or tolerate aloneness, to his capacity to modulate anger and anxiety, to the elaboration of opiate receptors in the brain and

finally to his compulsive need to externalize blame because accepting responsibility reactivates the motivation. (p. 140)

Can these men change their behaviours? There is still much controversy around this matter.

Treatment Programs

The history of group treatment for male batterers has been short but eventful. Research into the treatment of abusive men began in the late 1970s: in April 1977, the first counselling agency to offer treatment exclusively to male batterers in the United States began operation (Jennings, 1987). The program outlined by Jennings and named “Emerge” experimented with different treatment modalities, decided on group treatment as a preference and became a model for treatment programs. There appears to be some debate exists as to whether group counselling is the most effective treatment modality (Harris, Savage, Jones, & Brooks, 1988); however, groups have become the most common treatment approach for abusive men (Bidgood, Tutty, & Rothery, 1993).

Although there has been considerable research conducted in such groups, controversy exists as to what exactly is the most effective approach. Researchers have discussed options including instructed self-help group format (Edleson & Syers, 1991), and a multidimensional approach (Noske & Wallace, 1988) in the treatment of abusive men. Furthermore, although detailed research has been conducted into the characteristics of abusive men in areas such as personality traits (Bersani, Chen, Pendleton, & Denton, 1992), Jennings (1990) asserts that the conceptualizations of treatment programs are “ill-conceived” (p. 58). Further research will add to the body of knowledge in this field.

If treatment groups for male batterers are to be effective, the origins of abusive behaviour need to be determined. It has been suggested that more than 80% of abusive

men witnessed or experienced abuse in their family of origin (Roy, 1977). Waldo (1987) argues that this intergenerational nature of abuse works on the two levels of dynamics and learning. From a dynamic perspective, when a child is abused or witnesses abuse, he/she feels rage, but he is unable to stop the abuse. This combination of powerful feelings and powerlessness “inhibits their development of ego strength and self-esteem” (Waldo, 1987, p. 385). The child responds by repressing emotions, anger is carried forward into relationships with other adults where the low self-esteem can be threatened, and low ego strength fails to control the anger response. If Waldo’s assertions are correct, strengthening of self-esteem will lessen the perception of a threat and, thereby decrease the incidence of anger. The increase of self-esteem is, therefore, a worthy treatment objective. Jennings (1990) also recognizes low self-esteem as one of many problems for abusive men, and argues that interventions designed to stop violence lead to unrealistic treatment outcome expectations without the consideration of contributing factors such as childhood abuse and socialization.

Parenting Groups

Various parenting groups have been available for some years now. Parenting skills were once considered innate, something we instinctively knew as soon as we had children. Now we recognize that successful parenting requires training and new information. Most people parent the way that they were parented. Many of us have thought, “I’ll never do that to my children,” only to catch ourselves doing the very same thing. Families where physical punishment was the norm, in all likelihood, will carry on this form of punishment to the next generation (M. Straus, personal communication, 1995). These parents, more than any other, need to be shown alternative ways to parent.

Since there is a variety of parenting programs available, I will discuss the more popular ones.

Three programs appear to be used consistently by parent educators: Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) (Gordon, 1975), Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976), and Active Parenting (Popkin, 1993a, 1993b).

PET identifies ways for parents to help the family function in a more positive way (Chant & Nelson, 1982). PET emphasizes the communication of feelings and the cooperative resolution of parent-child conflict (Todres & Bunston, 1993).

The STEP program encourages parents to identify the child's mistaken goals of behaviour and then gives parents strategies to respond to them. This program is based on Adlerian theory and stresses the use of encouragement instead of praise and promotes non-punitive ways to parent. The program focuses on the parent understanding the child's point of view.

Active Parenting is the newest of the programs and is a video-based program, presenting parents with a series of role-plays, asking them to find the appropriate way to handle each situation. Parents then are encouraged to role-play the new parenting technique.

How effective are parenting programs? Todres and Bunston (1993) conducted research on the use of three different parenting programs: (a) behaviour modification, (b) parent effectiveness training (PET), and (c) Adlerian approaches (STEP). These researchers believe that parenting programs provide opportunities for primary and secondary prevention, helping parents to understand how their behaviour will affect their child's self-esteem, how to cope with parental stress, and how to be more prepared for the

more difficult ages. However, Todres and Bunston (1993) also feel that even though parenting groups have proven to be effective,

. . . [they] are inadequate in design and lacking in methodological rigour, these evaluations are limited in their ability to inform theory with empirical evidence, to effectively match outcome to process and parent needs and, therefore, to contribute to informed program planning decisions. (p. 239)

Parenting groups provide important information to parents. However, evaluating their outcomes has been a missing component and to truly recognize their worth evaluation must be addressed.

Summary

Until a few years ago, the prognosis of men with a history of domestic abuse appeared gloomy and hopeless, but the availability of new treatment programs is slowly changing societal perceptions. The literature in the field of family violence continues to present a myriad of unresolved issues and continues to ask many unanswered questions. This uncertainty presents a much different picture of abusive men than the comment “batterers will never change.” It is hoped that ongoing investigation will lead to more answers. In books such as Boys Will Be Boys, Miedzian (1991) attempts to break through society’s stereotyping of men and recognizes the importance of involving men in child rearing. Jaffe’s (1990) work demonstrates the intergenerational aspect of family violence and its effect on children. Dutton’s (1988, 1994) research has proven that with treatment abusive men can change their behaviour. Other researchers such as Straus have shown that teaching parents alternatives to spanking would greatly reduce the violence in the world (M. Straus, personal communication, 1996).

The literature review has shown that, while treatment programs for abusive men have increased, there are still very few parenting programs available for these men. The men attending the parenting program created their own stories as they attended the 12-week group. As Ellis (1998a) stated: “The aim of interpretive inquiry is not to write the end of a story but a more hopeful beginning for new stories” (p. 10). For many of these men and their children, their new stories will be more hopeful.

In conclusion, interpretive inquiry through the use of stories allows us to “learn to think, not just like someone else, but more richly and fruitfully than we could before in our efforts and wisdom toward finding more promising and helpful approaches to difficult problems” (Ellis, 1998a, p. 10). Domestic violence is a disturbing problem: listening to the stories of these men may be one step toward prevention.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

My Need to Research

Four years ago I was approached by a father attending the YWCA Sheriff King's treatment program for men who have been abusive to their partners. He was struggling with his role as a father and felt a parenting group would benefit him a great deal. He expressed concern about participating in a coed group and wondered if it was possible for me to facilitate a parenting program for men. I felt very uncertain about responding to such a request for a number of reasons. My primary job was to work with children and I was not sure if this would fall under my mandate. I knew nothing about working with men and I was not sure I wanted to. After a period of indecisiveness I agreed to offer the group. During the 4 years of working with these men I witnessed many changes occurring in their lives. Colleagues also began expressing an interest in finding out more about this group. At the same time I found my work with children in the area of family violence was missing an important component--their fathers. Very few fathers participated in the coed parenting programs that were offered to the families of children who had experienced or witnessed family violence. However, the fathers participating in the men's parenting programs were gradually disclosing bits and pieces of their stories and these parts did not portray the picture I expected. Their stories were, for the most part, inconsistent with what I was hearing and reading. I became curious about what I was observing and the need to find some answers led to this study.

Quantitative or Qualitative?

Once I made the decision to embark on this study, I grappled with the best approach to conduct the research. I was unsatisfied with the few quantitative studies that were presented at conferences that I had attended. These studies only examined the results of pre- and post-testing and failed to capture the whole picture. These reports seemed to convey a negative and hopeless inevitability that change was possible with these men. In my initial quest to measure change in the men's behaviour I also employed pre- and post-testing as well as the Parent-Child Conflict Tactic Scale (Straus, 1979) which measures the emotional and physical abuse directed toward a child. I had also designed a questionnaire to elicit more information, with the hope of better understanding the experiences of these fathers. They reported finding the questions cumbersome and the questionnaire too long. Also of concern to me was the fact that the responses were still not capturing the changes I was starting to see during group process. This is similar to Polkinghorne's (1988) experience as he describes in his book Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences: "I have not found the findings of academic research of much help in my work as a clinician" (p. ix). I felt these fathers had stories to share and only through their stories could I assess their experiences.

The role of the researcher in quantitative research was not a good fit for me. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the role of the researcher in quantitative research as seeking substantiate theoretical constructs through a process that emphasizes the necessity for carefully maintained neutrality and objectivity. They further indicate that positivist or quantitative methodologies see carefully constructed inquiry as value-free, and advocate that knower and known are independent. I was familiar with the experiences of these men but felt this would be an advantage I would have as the

researcher, and the amount of time I would spend with the participants in the study would not allow for us to remain strangers. Therefore quantitative research methodology was not a good fit for me.

Merriam (1997) refers to qualitative research as an umbrella concept that covers several forms of inquiry that help the reader to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena within a natural setting. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning of the participant's experiences, how all the parts fit together to form the whole, and how they make sense of their world. Patton (1985, cited in Merriam, 1988) further explains:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interaction there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting--what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting--and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding.
(p. 6)

Qualitative and quantitative research are very different methods, as we see in Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) comparison:

The word "qualitative" implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured, in terms of quantity, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the

situational constraints that shape the inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported within a value-free framework. (p. 4)

Upon reviewing initial attempts using quantitative methods, and upon reflection on the above rationale, I saw the necessity for a qualitative approach to this study.

Interpretive Inquiry

Qualitative methodology includes a number of approaches. Some of these are case studies, ethnography and participant observation, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, interpretive practice, and grounded theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Patton (1990) describes 10 theoretical traditions of qualitative research. To the previous list he adds heuristics, systems theory, and hermeneutics.

For this study I have chosen to use interpretive or hermeneutic inquiry. According to Smith (1991), hermeneutics involves “creating meaning, not simply reporting on it” (p. 201). He further adds that hermeneutics is different from grounded theory and ethnographic approaches in that they give an account of people’s own thoughts and actions from their own point of view, whereas in hermeneutics interpretation occurs within the researcher’s framework. The task of the inquirer is the interpretation of all manner of human expressions not only in terms of the motives, intentions and purposes of the people involved, but also in terms of the inquirer’s own motives intentions and purposes (Smith, 1993a, p. 185). Addison (1989) points out that

the researcher cannot be value-free and always brings their own subjectivity to the situation.

People interpret continually. Through our interpretation of people and their activities we plan how to respond to them. Interpretive inquiry describes our “very mode of being in the world” and hermeneutics has articulated what interpretation is (Ellis, 1998b, p. 35). All human interaction involves communication out of which new meanings and wisdom grow (Packer & Addison, 1989a). Philosophical hermeneutics begins with the notion there is “out there,” no meaning or knowledge waiting to be disclosed to the “mind’s eye” until the act of understanding brings it into being. Human activity creates knowledge. Meaning or knowledge is not discovered, instead it is created. We can discard any fear that we will somehow miss finding “objective reality.” A uniquely correct interpretation does not exist since perception is interpretation and each person perceives from “a different vantage point and history” (Ellis, 1998a, p. 8). The essence of the interpretive/hermeneutic approach is this: from a caring and concerned stance the researcher engages in a dialogical encounter with the entity and through the use of questions and answers a fusion of new horizons is reached and meaning is created (Smith, 1991).

Key Themes in Hermeneutics

Smith (1991) suggests that any discussion of interpretive inquiry should include a review of the three key themes in hermeneutics established since the work of Schleiermacher in 1819. “The first theme is the inherently creative character of interpretation. The interpreter works holistically, rather than using classification systems, in an effort to discern the intent or meaning behind another’s expression (cited in Ellis, 1998c, p. 15). The second theme, as described by Smith (1991, cited in Ellis 1998c) is

the interplay between the part and whole in the process of interpretation. Smith (1993a) further adds “that good interpretation involves the interplay between the specific and the general, the micro and the macro” (p. 190). Interpretation can only be pursued with the constant movement back and forth between the expression and the web of meanings within which that expression is lodged. In that this is a process that has no natural starting or ending points, it is best thought of in terms of a circle—a condition most often referred to by the label “hermeneutic circle” (Smith, 1993b, p. 161).

The third and final theme is the pivotal role of language in interpretation. Ellis (1998a) suggests that “language is more than a tool, it is the very basis of understanding itself” (p. 9). Language is linked with understanding, as one is relative so is the other. Language is the tool used to describe interpretation, as language changes new understandings are possible.

The Fore-Structure of Interpretation

An important principle of hermeneutics holds that the researcher’s own experiences, in essence, their own autobiography is brought to the study (Ellis, 1998c). This is what Heidegger (1927, 1962, cited in Ellis, 1998c) refers to as the fore-structure of interpretation. Fore-structure can be described as all of one’s own life experiences. Often the fore-structure remains largely in the background as “taken for granted.” Consciously recognizing this fore-structure and its influence can allow the researcher to arrive at a more explicit interpretation for account (Dreyfus, 1980, cited in Addison, 1989).

The researcher also brings their conscious preunderstandings to the research, their knowledge and concern for the problem. This prior relationship enables them to have a better understanding of study being investigated. The researcher who brings a

preunderstanding of caring and concern to the study is able to interpret the research in a way that would not be possible if these preunderstandings were not available (Ellis, 1998c). The researcher conducting an interpretive account would need to examine their preunderstandings to become as clear as possible about the way it was influencing their interpretation.

The Hermeneutic Circle

The hermeneutic circle is formed as a result of the back-and-forth movement between the parts and the whole, between the micro and the macro. Understanding human behaviour can only occur within the constant movement back and forth between what was spoken and the meaning in which it was embedded (Ellis, 1998c; Smith, 1991, 1993b). The fore-structure and the preunderstandings we use to make initial sense of the research is referred to as the forward arch of the hermeneutic circle. Ellis (1998c) describes this as “making sense of a research participant, situation, or a set of data by drawing on one’s autobiography (beliefs, values, interests, interpretive frameworks) and one’s own relationship to the question or problem (preunderstanding or concerned engagement)” (p. 27). While in the backward arch the researcher questions their initial interpretations and allows a reexamination of their work for gaps, contradictions, omissions, surprises, or confirmation of the initial account (Ellis, 1998c; Parker & Addison, 1989a; Smith, 1991). This back-and-forth movement allows a more complete analysis of the work because it engenders a constant reevaluation of the interpretation. This also increases propensity to access outside frameworks and understandings.

Another important aspect of the hermeneutic circle is looking at the way narrative accounts of social behaviour are embedded in a larger context (Addison, 1989). Again this involves the movement between the micro (the participant) and the macro (society)

and enables researchers to make better sense of their data. The goal of the research is to not to determine the accurate interpretation but the most complete interpretation that can be developed at this time (Ellis, 1998c).

Qualitative Case Study

Interpretive inquiry can be understood as a case study. According to Merriam (1988), a case study can be defined as an “examination of a specific phenomenon such as an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. The bounded system, or case, might be selected because it is an instance of some concern, issue, or hypothesis” (p. 11). Merriam (1988, 1997) also suggests this method can create in-depth understanding. The case study focuses on process and discovery rather than outcome and confirmation. Its emphasis on context implies a holistic perspective well-suited to complex situations in which multiple variables become inextricably blended (Merriam, 1988, 1997).

Characteristics of case studies. The case study can be defined by the following four characteristics (Merriam, 1988, 1997):

1. The case study is particularistic which means that it focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon.
2. The case study is descriptive. The end product should be a rich thick description of the phenomenon under study.
3. The case study is heuristic. It should convey a logical understanding to readers of the phenomenon under study. It can bring about discovery of new meaning.
4. The case study should rely on inductive reasoning, the ability to generalize from specific narratives.

The purpose and values of case studies. The particular approach taken in a case study can be described by the nature of its final account. It may be descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative (Merriam, 1988, 1997). A descriptive case study moves in a theoretical vacuum neither guided by nor motivated by the desire to form hypotheses. New programs often begin the formation of a data base from which theories can be built through the employment of descriptive case studies. An interpretive case study also contains rich descriptions which are used to develop conceptual categories or address previous theoretical assumptions. The researcher collects the data with the intent of interpreting or theorizing about the phenomenon. Evaluative case studies include judgement, along with description and explanation. This case study evaluates information to produce a final judgement (Guba & Lincoln, cited in Merriam, 1988).

Strengths and weaknesses of case studies. As with any research design, case studies have advantages and disadvantages. The strengths, according to Merriam (1988, 1997) and MacNealy (1999) are the following:

1. Case studies provide the researcher with a holistic way of understanding the problem under investigation.
2. Through the use of rich and holistic accounts, they offer insights and a better understanding of the phenomenon studied. These new meanings then can often lead to further research.
3. They provide a way to capture information that may otherwise go unnoticed such as the emotions of the participants.
4. Within this paradigm there is more emphasis on an accurate research question.

The disadvantages reported by these authors include:

1. Studies can continue for a long period and cost a great deal of time and money.

2. Sensitivity and integrity of the investigator as well as inherent biases can affect the end result.
3. Case studies results are not generalizable.
4. They are often considered non-scientific.

Yin (1994) further describes the role of the researcher. He views the preunderstandings of the researcher as a strength for the case study:

Each case study investigator must understand the theoretical or policy issues because judgements have to be made during the data collection. Without a firm grasp of the issues, you could miss important clues and would not know when a deviation was acceptable or even desirable. (p. 59)

If the researcher approaches the problem with caring concern and a knowledge of the research as promoted by hermeneutics, there is a stronger probability of the study enhancing the knowledge base. The strengths of case studies will outweigh their weaknesses if pursuing research in this way.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that involves listening to the stories of the people who experience them. Narrative inquiry is itself of value but it may also serve the purposes of interpretive inquiry when it is nestled within that framework. According to Butt and Raymond (1987), all experiences and aspects of a subject's life are candidates for inclusion in a narrative story. It follows that any of these experiences or aspects are also candidates for the assignment of meaning. In his book, The Call of Stories, Robert Coles refers to patients as "storytellers" (cited in Ellis, 1998b). Narrative is the coming together of important events and life experiences in the form of the story as related by the storyteller. In the field of psychology, Sarbin (1986) feels therapists will

have a better understanding of their clients' behaviours if they work holistically with stories instead of relying on already-formed theories. This type of inquiry relies on creating meaning which is useful and helpful from within these stories as apposed to creating meaning from without by means of external theories.

According to Polkinghorne (1988),

Narrative meaning is created by noting that something is the cause of something else and is focused on those rudimentary aspects of experience that concern human actions or events that affect human beings. The meaning of each event is produced by the part it plays in the whole episode. The episode needs to include both some end point as well as the contributions that the event and actions made in bringing about or delaying the achievement of that end point. (p. 60)

Augustine (cited in Polkinghorne, 1988) described time in narrative as a threefold notion that includes a present as past (we remember), a present as present (we attend), and a present as future (we anticipate). A good narrative creates a compelling message which elicits a sense of meaning for the reader. Bruner (1990) further adds that a good narrative is neither right nor wrong, but instead "represent[s] efforts to mediate culture and the individual's more idiosyncratic world of beliefs, desires, and hopes" (cited in Ellis, 1998c, p. 45). This process is ultimately connected to interpretive research by creating an understanding of individual meanings and cultural meanings.

Narrative analysis. There is not a single right way to do narrative analysis. Labov (cited in Mishler, 1986) presents a model for analysis of narrative interviews where the objective is to abstract the theme of the story from the total response of the participant. Mishler (1986) outlines an analysis which focuses on the content of self-identity. Mishler can be credited with giving narrative a home within the interview process. He stresses

the importance of looking at the entire interview to craft the narrative portraits instead of reducing the interviews to simple codes. In summary, there are a variety of ways of conducting a narrative analysis and the procedures usually depend on the intent of the inquiry.

The analysis begins in the forward arch of the hermeneutic circle with the crafting of the narrative portraits and clustering the stories and statements according to reoccurring topics. At this time one must be aware of their fore-structure and preunderstandings they bring to the research. “One than can look across the clusters of stories attempting to discern values, concerns, predisposition, ways of proceeding or ways of making sense of social situations that reappear across clusters of stories. Such values, preoccupations, or interpretive frameworks can be pulled out to form their own clusters” (Ellis, 1998c, p. 41). The researcher continues by looking for themes that may be present across clusters.

Next the researcher enters the backward arch of the hermeneutic circle and evaluates the initial interpretation, exploring the gaps, contradictions, surprises, omissions, or confirmation with the initial account. The researcher at this time may need to revisit the transcripts to answer the many questions that can arise when in this backward arch (Ellis, 1998c).

Interviewing

Interviewing is the most common method of data collection in qualitative studies. The face-to-face interview affords the greatest opportunity to develop a rich description of a subject’s world, encompassing their thoughts, feelings, and intentions (Patton, 1990). The approach taken may be either formal or informal. The formal interview often uses an interview guide, which serves as a checklist for the interviewer. This guide ensures the

same questions are asked of each person being interviewed. The order of the questions may vary; the interviewer decides on the best individual approach with each participant. The informal conversation interview is an open-ended approach where the questions usually flow from previous dialogue. The data obtained from each interviewee will depend on the questions asked; therefore, the same information may not be obtained from each participant.

The focus of the study and the research method used also determines the way the interviewer asks questions. A researcher using grounded theory may start with open and general questions, proceeding to the more specific. An ethnographic research has a goal of eliciting information across cultures. The researcher using hermeneutics has the desire to understand the lived experiences of others as they themselves understand these experiences. Consequently one may pursue this end through one general open-ended question, with the intent to elicit a story or mini stories, as opposed to short responses or “answers” (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1994, p. 304). The researcher then interprets the interview and creates another story. The phenomenological method also delves into the lived experience of subjects and relies on thick, rich description.

The personal approach of the researcher also plays an important part in the interview. In the Nature of Interviewing, Weber (1986) refers to the concepts of trust, remembering people, and betrayal. The interviewee places him or herself in a position of vulnerability by discussing personal aspects of their life with the researcher. As the researcher has ultimate control of the final output, the subject places themselves at some risk. It is important for the researcher to convey genuineness and concern in both attitude and through formal and informal contracting.

The power of the interview can last for a long time. The interview does not end when the participants part ways. The interviewer usually remembers and reflects on what was said long after the interview. Often the information shared becomes more clear and the interviewer thinks of other questions they wished they had asked (Weber, 1986). The setting in which the interview takes place should afford comfort and relaxation to the participants and help them to feel comfortable and relaxed. An interviewer who demonstrates good listening skills will also help the interviewee feel more at ease and willing to talk (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1994).

Observations

Observation is another form of data collection that is often used in interpretive inquiry. Observations are not, typically, the only data collection method utilized in a study but, combined with other techniques, enrich the research. Observation is often blended with researcher participation. Patton (1990) contends that the extent of participation can vary from passive spectator to total emergence. The blending of observation and participation may vary over the course of the study.

Patton (1990) also adds, "In participant observation the researcher shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study. The purpose of such participation is to develop an insider's view of what is happening" (p. 206). This gives the observer the opportunity to not only see what is happening but also to experience what it is like to be part of the setting.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) support the use of observation in qualitative studies in the following statement:

The basic methodological arguments for observations may be summarized as these: observation . . . maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs,

concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like; observation . . . allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment; observation . . . provides the inquirer with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively.
(p. 273)

Through the use of observation, a researcher can witness participants make sense of their stories. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also suggest that observations move from unstructured to more focussed as information and insights accumulate. Nonverbal signals amongst participants constitute a significant aspect of data collection through observation. Nonverbal signals include such things as making eye contact, removing a jacket or hat, facing the group, facing away, or smiling. Nonverbal signals are often unconscious actions.

Procedures

After 4 years facilitating the men's parenting group I was becoming curious about how the men experienced the group process. I wondered if the men or their children had experienced changes in the way that I had observed. I eventually realized that in order to understand their group process experiences I needed to explore their pasts, their relationships, their hopes for the future, and the meaning they attached to the parameters of their experiences. The expressed purpose of the study then became: to gain a better understanding of how these men experienced their lives.

The study group began on March 3, 1998. The study participants were selected from among the men's parenting group members and contacted by phone to discuss the possibility of participation in the study. All the men initially agreed to participate.

Subsequently they were presented with a letter further describing the purpose of the study and the implications of their participation. Further issues were addressed as the interviews progressed. Confidentiality was discussed and they were asked to decide on a pseudonym, a task they appeared to enjoy. Before interviews began each man signed a consent form. The interviews were conducted on May 6, May 7, and May 14. Each interview proceeded informally and began with the following questions: (a) Tell me about your relationship with your children, (b) Tell me about your childhood and what that means to you now, and (c) Tell me about a situation (if one exists) where you are parenting differently and what that means to you. These questions formed the springboard to the dialogue that occurred in which the men reflected on many aspects of their experiences. These interviews were then transcribed and data analysis commenced.

The final interviews were conducted after the last week of group--June 5, June 11, and June 23. The men were invited to add new information or reflect on previous discussions. I, too, reflected on some of my understandings. This interview also began with one open-ended question, as follows: How do you see your role as a father? Subsequently the interviews were transcribed in August, 1998.

Parallel to the interviews, participant observations were also documented at the end of every group session. Data were also collected through intake forms, evaluations, telephone calls, and previous groups participants had attended. The transcripts were compiled and distributed to the participants by the end of October. I was unable to contact one participant until January.

Site and Participants

In the present study the following criteria were adhered to. The intention of these criteria is to establish relevant variables.

1. The men must be involved in the Men's treatment program at the YWCA Sheriff King Family Support Centre.
2. The men must be attending the Men's parenting program at the YWCA Sheriff King Family Support Centre.
3. The men must be fathers.
4. The men must be willing and able to reflect and share their personal stories (as demonstrated in group).

Three men were chosen after attending the men's parenting program for about 4 weeks. The decision was delayed until this time to establish the required criteria as well as the likelihood of commitment on the part of participants.

Variability amongst participants was ensured by selecting men who differed with regard to several characteristics. These variables were age, degree of violence in their relationships, and stage of treatment.

Ethical Considerations

The guidelines for ethical considerations stipulated by the University of Lethbridge, Graduate Studies, were the template for this study. All participants were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study, the potential risks and benefits and their rights as voluntary participants. They were encouraged to ask questions at any time and were informed there was no obligation to answer any question they were uncomfortable with. In addition, participants were given a letter explaining the purpose and process of the study. They were subsequently asked to sign a voluntary consent form (Appendix A & B).

It was recognized that certain topics discussed during the interviews could trigger painful memories for the participants and they were advised they could contact the

YWCA Sheriff King Family Support Centre to speak to a therapist. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The data were identified by the pseudonym each participant had chosen and all taped conversations were kept in the researcher's personal care during the data collection process. The participants were informed that these tapes would be erased at the end of the study.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study included a variety of activities that took place over a 12-month period. Keeping with the hermeneutic practice I approached all data collection from a caring and concerned perspective, always aware of the power I held in the role of the researcher. The researcher ultimately has more power than the participants as they choose how to represent the participants, their experience, and the data itself in the final document (Weber, 1986). "Would the men view this as a betrayal of their trust?", "Was this comment meant to be shared?" were questions I constantly asked myself. Data collection consisted of observations conducted during the group sessions. Observations were documented in an observation log about each man's level of participation, responsibility for his behaviour, nonverbal cues, use of language, understanding of content, changes in behaviour, and attitude about parenting. MacNealy (1999) compares this use of a log to a ship's captain records--how he knows where his ship has been and what new land or conditions were sighted. The observation log gave me the opportunity to view the entire journey of each man's group experience and became one of the parts that was included in the back-and-forth movement of the hermeneutic circle.

Next, data were collected from the participants' intake forms, both from the parenting group and the men's treatment program. The information was compared for

omissions and congruencies, and field notes were recorded in a journal. As the intake forms for each program were different, new information was gleaned from the men's treatment intake that was not available in the parenting information.

Conducting interviews was also part of the data collection and this occurred on two separate occasions. The first interview took place approximately 6 weeks after the beginning of group, and the final interview occurred after the last week of group. The interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed for analysis.

Final data collection was derived from telephone conversations from the participants and other service providers that may have been involved, such as child welfare and previous group facilitators. These conversations were documented in a journal. The analysis of the data raised many questions that required me to constantly revisit each data collection activity. This enabled me to make sense of each piece in terms of all other pieces in order to understand each part in relation to the whole.

Interviews. Following the guidelines of qualitative research I tried to conduct the interviews in as natural a setting as possible. I invited the participants to my office for the interview process. Since my office is also the play therapy room I thought the men would feel more comfortable surrounded by toys and stuffed animals versus a metal desk and chair. There was also a rocking chair available which could add a somewhat nurturing aspect to the setting. All the interviews were scheduled when it was convenient for the men, so the time of day varied between 2:30 and 6:00 p.m.

In keeping with Ellis's (1998b) guideline of "communicating acceptance and genuine interest" (p. 39), I tried to ensure the participants felt as comfortable as possible. We started the interview with a chit chat about the day and I also inquired if they had any questions about the process. I further explained that if I asked anything they felt

uncomfortable about they could let me know and we could discuss their feelings about the questions. I then explained more about the study and why it was of particular interest to me, including in that, my history with the parenting group. As Weber (1986) explains, when an interviewer approaches the interviewee with an interest in getting to know the other person, the interviewee usually accepts the invitation. Furthermore, the interviewee honestly then feels it would be important for them to participate as they consider they have something important to offer to the research.

I continued with explaining the use of the audiotape and tried it to ensure that it was working properly. In spite of this preparation I felt, as Ellis (1998b) stated, “both the interviewer and interviewee may feel a little apprehensive” (p. 39). I wondered what would happen if they had nothing to say and indeed each man responded differently to the questions. All three men appeared somewhat uncomfortable at the beginning, but two of them noticeably relaxed as they became more involved in their stories. At times we were so engrossed in the conversation that the tape recorder in the middle of the room, as Weber (1986) points out, was forgotten. On the other hand, one participant seemed to be more guarded about his answers and almost seemed to be focussed on trying to give the correct answer.

I used an open-ended semi-structured interview format that was guided by the following questions:

1. Tell me about your relationship with your children.
2. Tell me about your childhood and what it means to you now.
3. Tell me about a situation (if one exists) where you are parenting differently and what that means to you.

These questions were used to set a context for the interview but were not rigidly presented. For the most part I tried to keep my questions to a minimum and allow the participants to tell their stories in their own way. Questions were asked when I felt I needed further information to better understand what was being discussed. Merriam's (1997) comparison of the researcher's role came to mind as I interviewed the participants. "The investigator's role in qualitative research can be compared to that of a detective. At first everything is important; everyone is suspect. It takes time and patience to search for clues, to follow up leads, to find the missing pieces, to put the puzzle together" (p. 21). At first I felt completely overwhelmed by the information that was shared and was uncertain how everything would fit together. The men discussed many issues during the interview and strayed a great deal from the original questions to include their relationship with their ex-partners, custody issues, group experiences, and more intimate details about themselves. I soon came to understand Weber's (1986) comments about the power the interviewer holds when deciding to put pen to paper and what will be written about the interview. During the course of one interview one man shared his mixed feelings about being single and how he often felt guilty about not having as much responsibility for the children. He also shared how he was looking after himself better, he exercised all the time and had lost 30 pounds since his separation. He looked somewhat surprised after his comments, almost as if he was surprised at allowing himself to talk so openly. Another man shared his experience of being involved in a killing when he was 15 and his following trip to a psych ward for assessment. This was completely new information to me and I was totally surprised by the disclosure. Yet despite feeling somewhat off balance I was able to stay present to the man's needs and validate his feelings around this experience. When it came time to analyze that data I debated about using this

information as I was not sure it would be seen as a betrayal of his trust. I decided to present each man with a copy of the transcripts before crafting the narrative portraits to allow them to discuss with me any uncomfortable feelings they may have about the information being used. The only comments I received were about incorrectly recording the number of brothers and sisters in each man's family. During the interviews I became aware of similar answers and patterns to questions and this in turn aroused my curiosity to further explore their answers.

The interviews lasted anywhere from 60 to 120 minutes. After the last interview the tapes were then transcribed and reviewed before the next interview.

The second interview started with a revisit to the initial interview questions and an invitation to the participants to add any comments or thoughts after having the time to reflect on their answers. I also clarified some of my thoughts after reviewing the transcripts from the first interview. With one man in particular I had trouble understanding Child Welfare's role in the family and needed clarification on this point. Another man had not given much information on his previous relationship so we further discussed this as I did not understand which children belonged in which relationship. I also wanted to explore more of their understandings about how they felt their childhood experiences were affecting them now and what the group experience had been like for them. Two of the men seemed comfortable even in the early stages of this interview. The same man who remained quite aloof in the first interview arrived at this interview with a black eye he received in a fight at work. The beginning of his interview focussed around the fight and what he could have done differently. The questions discussed in the second interview were: (1) Tell me how you see your role as a father, and (2) tell me a little about your group experience. These interviews were a little shorter, ranging from

45 to 75 minutes. I thought in this interview the men felt more comfortable about questioning their involvement as a father and expressing their frustration at not feeling valued in this role. They shared their concerns about the little influence they had on their children and how it hurt not to be consulted when major decisions were being made about their children's lives. These interviews were also transcribed but not as quickly as the initial interviews due to an illness with the transcriber.

Observations and field notes. Observations were recorded after interactions with the participants, during group sessions, interviews, telephone conversations with participants or other professionals, and informal meetings that occurred. The group observations were documented in an observation log at the end of the group sessions. As noted previously, observations recorded in the group included the level of participation, responsibility for their behaviour, non-verbal cues, changes in behaviour and attitude about parenting, understanding about content, and use of language. Field notes were recorded in a journal along with any questions that arose after many hours of reflection of the data.

My role as researcher could be described as a participant observer because I facilitated the group and often shared my own experiences as a parent. The researcher who assumes the role of a participant observer collects information and begins to interpret it in the setting (Patton, 1990). At times during the group process I would wonder about certain statements or feelings I saw expressed that evening and upon reflection later be in awe of the stories that were formulating. In keeping with hermeneutic principles I was constantly moving back and forth between the part and the whole looking for meaning.

Through the use of observation I witnessed members beginning to make sense of their stories. As the group progressed, they seemed to understand how their past was connected to the present and how their hopes for the future revolved around separating the unhealthy patterns from the healthy patterns. As the participants felt more comfortable, laughter and tears, anger and excitement were often observed during the group sessions. I found that my observations recorded at the beginning of group were less detailed than the ones recorded at the end which offered more insights. As I became more familiar with the participants over time, more questions arose. The responses would then give me more insights into their lives. This also coincides with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) findings of observations recorded on group experiences.

Ellis (1998c) describes a study that involves a variety of data collection activities as having "each activity as a series of loops in a spiral. Each loop may represent a separate activity that resembles 'data collection and interpretation'" (p. 19). She further adds "that what one learns in the loop provides direction or a reframing of the question for the next loop" (p. 20). The observations recorded in group became part of my questions and thoughts during the interviews. The insights during the interviews helped me to better understand behaviour in the group. During the initial interview with one participant we had a discussion about play and the way he played with his children. His play activities as a child included very little free play or fantasy play; instead, his play was more structured such as playing board games. This became more obvious during the group session on play when he expressed how uncomfortable he was with the fantasy play. He clarified during the interview that the only time he played with his father was when they played board games and he still felt uncomfortable engaging in any other play with his children.

Analysis

Data analysis began after the first group session and continued after each data collection activity. Observations were recorded on group participation and field notes were constructed from the intake forms and analyzed. This initial analysis was reviewed to choose the participants for the study. To analyze the data I referred to Ellis's (1998c) metaphor of the spiral. Each loop in the spiral can either represent an analysis for a separate data collection activity, or there can be a constant movement back and forth when looking for gaps, contradictions, and patterns:

Theses often combine "multi-loop" and "single-loop" inquiries. When a study entails a series of interviews and observations, what the researcher learns in each activity provides a focus or a reframe of the question for the next inquiry. At the end of the data collection the researcher then works again with all transcripts, field notes, research notes and artifacts, experiencing them as a whole or single text. Although the researcher has been making sense of the data all along, the task at the end is to articulate the most coherent and comprehensive account of what one can learn from the sum of the inquiries. Each transcript and field note has become part of a whole and the meaning of each can now be reconsidered in relation to the whole. (Ellis, 1998c, p. 26)

The first loop in the analysis consisted of studying the intake forms completed by the men for the parenting group and the men's treatment program. As each intake form obtains different information, field notes were constructed from both forms. The parenting group intake focuses on information about their children and their parenting styles. The men's intake form concentrates on relationships, goal setting, and childhood experiences. Some of the data taken from these forms consisted of completely new information that was

never discussed in the interviews or during the group. For example, one participant had written he had been sexually abused as a child and never told anyone until well into his adult years. Having this information helped me to understand the rage that he talked about frequently in the group. I revisited this information further on in the hermeneutic circle when I had questions about the level of his anger. This package also includes the physical and non-physical scale and the men completed these scales by rating their abusive behaviour. I returned to this information often in my head during the group as they talked openly about the abuse that had occurred in their relationships.

Observations were another data collection activity for this study. Observations were recorded throughout the study after every interaction with the participants or other persons involved with the participants. The observations were recorded first in an observation log, then reviewed and transferred to a journal. I wrote observations about what I was seeing, questions I had about what I was seeing, how I felt, and how I was doing the study. The analysis of the observations began after the first group session.

As I was recording the observations, I was trying to make initial sense of the data. I also realized the preunderstandings I brought to the study predisposed me to expect certain behaviours, patterns, and topics to emerge. However, many thoughts arose from the observations that led me to more questions. Then I would ask these questions during the interviews, phone calls, or the next week at group. I compared my observations to other group logs that were recorded on the men's participation in previous groups. This information helped me to relate all the parts to the whole. The notes from the observations were then incorporated with the other data to form several categories. This initial sense-making is referred to as the forward arch of the hermeneutic circle. I would spend a great deal of time in the forward arch with this initial interpretation. I then

revisited my observation journal when I moved to the backward arch, trying to find gaps, contradictions, themes, and surprises.

I began the analysis of the first interview after the audio tapes were transcribed. This initial analysis consisted of reading over the transcripts several times to become familiar with the information. I took notice of similar answers along with what may become similar themes, or so I thought at the time. I paid attention to the observations that I was recording in group and through other interactions I had with the participants and tried to fit them into the analysis of the interviews. Again, trying to be the detective that Merriam (1997) attributes to the role of the researcher, I also reviewed the information gleaned from the intake forms to include this material in the analysis. After reviewing the data I recorded any questions I had and asked them during the next interview. I also recorded my perceptions of the interview.

After the next interview once again the tapes were transcribed but this time it took a little longer as the transcriber became quite ill. However, there were some answers that stood out for me and I immediately tried to fit them into the categories I felt were emerging.

When I received the transcripts, I again read them over to become familiar with the material and cognizant of the patterns and topics I believed were emerging from the material. I then began the cut-and-paste method of physically cutting up transcripts according to what might fit into each category. At first I felt very overwhelmed with this task as there seemed to be so much information. This procedure took place over several months. I went through many hermeneutic circles interpreting this data, returning to the interview transcripts, and the field notes over and over as new understandings emerged. Finally I was able to recognize common topics that at that time I thought were themes. I

then labelled each topic and pasted the participants' comments underneath where they seemed to fit. After completing this process I then went on to write the narrative portraits. The first stories consisted of collecting the transcripts and arranging them in sequence. At that time I thought I was finished with the analysis, only to realize that I was still in the forward arch of the hermeneutic circle; I was still trying to make initial sense of the data. After what seemed to be a long period of time, I finally entered the backward arch where I was able to identify themes and surprises that were not obvious to me before.

Writing the portraits. Initially I crafted the narrative portraits by reviewing the clusters of reoccurring topics. I then set about writing the stories using the transcripts from the audiotapes. As the men talked about the past, present, and future, I wrote the stories including what Ellis (1998b) describes as a "portrayal of what engages, preoccupies, motivates, pleases, interests, frightens or displeases this person" (p. 42). I then gave the transcripts to the participants to review to see if there was anything they wanted to add, change, or delete from the material. This took place over a few months as one participant changed his phone number and I was unable to reach him. Some of the men took this opportunity to clarify some points they had made. One man commented about how he seemed "all over the place" during the interview.

After completing the changes I proceeded to craft the narrative portraits. "The narrative portrait requires deliberative writing" (Ellis, 1998b, p. 41). The stories began with a paragraph that, according to Ellis (1998b), "serves as a sketch incorporating the most prominent or interesting aspects of the person" (p. 41). I reread the transcripts and pulled out what seemed important and included this in the first paragraph. I looked for themes that seemed to be common to the topics with the hope that I would be able to

grasp the “meaning and significance of the topic” for each man (Ellis, 1998b, p. 42).

Again using the hermeneutic circle, I revisited the transcripts over and over again to gain a better understanding of how each man made sense of his world. The remaining portrait supported these themes more completely (Ellis, 1998b).

Examining themes. After I had read the transcripts for similar topics and clustered the material accordingly, I began the task of looking for themes. Until this point I was still in the forward arch of the hermeneutic circle and for unknown reasons struggled with entering the backward arch. I revisited the literature on themes, rereading van Manen’s description of themes, trying to visualize the connections interwoven through the men’s stories.

I reread and reflected on the clusters of stories, but to no avail; I could not seem to identify any themes. I then began to dialogue with colleagues about the topics. This dialogue sparked an enormous amount of reflection through which I was able to identify two themes: inefficacy and language. I continued on this path of reflection and quickly identified the theme of emotional attachment. The final theme that became obvious was the theme of emotional nurturance.

Evaluating the Study

When first trying to evaluate this study I turned to such concepts as credibility, transferability, and dependability. I soon rejected these concepts as they suggested the existence of a single truth or an objective reality. I turned to Packer and Addison’s four approaches for evaluating an interpretive account. In interpretive research, “truth is seen as ongoing. An unfolding process, where each successive interpretation has the possibility of uncovering up new possibilities” (Addison, 1989, p. 56).

The four general approaches suggested by Packer and Addison include: (1) requiring that the account be coherent, (2) examining its relationship to external evidence, (3) seeking consensus among various groups, and (4) assessing its relationship to future events. These authors believe that the researcher needs to ask if “what has been uncovered in an interpretive inquiry answers the practical concerned question that directed the inquiry” (p. 30).

In a summary of Packer and Addison’s (1989b) work Ellis (1998c) suggests six questions to ask to judge whether an answer has been uncovered by an interpretive account (pp. 28-29):

1. Is it plausible, convincing?
2. Does it fit with other material we know?
3. Does it have the power to change practice?
4. Has the researcher’s understanding been transformed?
5. Has a solution been uncovered?
6. Have new possibilities been opened up for the researcher, research participants, and the structure of the context?

In response to Packer and Addison’s (1989b) approaches, I felt I presented my analysis in a coherent manner. I examined the data in relationship to external evidence and included this material in the discussion chapter. I presented the final account to various groups, including my co-facilitator and a former colleague who has extensive experience working with men who abuse, and received consensus from both parties. Reviewing the final analysis, I feel the uncoverings will play a crucial role in treatment programs for men who abuse and I hope will play a part in changing the larger system,

society, and the way it views men who take responsibility for their abusive behaviour and their role as fathers.

I also feel the outcome has advanced the concern of better understanding the life experiences of the men participating in the study. My hope is that this research will act as a springboard for other investigators concerned with the role of fathers who have been abusive in their relationships. In answer to Ellis's (1998c) fourth question ("Has the researcher's understanding been transformed?"), I felt going into this study that I had an already in-depth understanding of the lives of these men and it came as quite a surprise the amount of "uncoverings" that became apparent during my data analysis. These uncoverings have only increased my motivation to continue to work with this population.

Reflections on the Research Process

Originally when beginning this study I believed I understood the lives of the men attending group. In fact, before choosing the participants for this study it was suggested that I invite men who had previously attended group to participate as I already knew their stories. It was thought there would be no surprises that could in any way harm the research. I debated about this and decided, since their stories were already familiar to me, I would choose participants from the group scheduled to begin in March. In spite of my confidence in the results of the study I found myself becoming quite anxious about the selection of the participants. I wondered what I would do if they rejected the information taught in group or if they would not take responsibility for their abusive behaviour.

I revisited these thoughts briefly as I began the first interviews. I soon realized these stories belonged to the men. It was my job as the interviewer to listen with empathy and ask questions to gain a better understanding of what was said. I was also able to use my preunderstandings to sensitize myself to the issues being discussed. I

believe my caring and concern about the question being studied built trust between myself and the men. I was very surprised at their willingness to share very personal experiences knowing that it would be part of the research. At times during the interviews and also during the group it felt as though they were relieved that someone was finally listening and not making judgements. I was also surprised at the differences between the participants: two shared quite openly while the one man whom I thought would talk the most seemed more focussed on giving the correct answers.

At times I became confused about the methodology and how it fit with the study. I originally thought of the study as narrative inquiry; however, I came to understand the work as interpretive inquiry which included narrative inquiry within it. When I reviewed my data collection activities they included much more than the interviews usually implemented in narrative inquiry. As I progressed with the study I was able to recognize that my work was interpretive, meaning that I interpreted the participants' accounts based on my knowledge, experience and understanding (Packer & Addison, 1989a).

I was also surprised at the incredible time I spent deliberating and reflecting or being in the hermeneutic circle, moving back and forth between the various data collection activities and my emerging understanding of the men's experiences. I struggled frequently when arranging the data into categories and would have to return to the transcripts for a better understanding. Although I was initially impatient with this process, I eventually came to understand that doing a hermeneutic study required me to be willing to return to the transcripts, even though I thought I was finished with them. I returned again and again as new understandings were reached and my knowledge of the men's experiences deepened.

My biggest challenge through the entire research was identifying the themes and surprises in the data. I first looked for patterns and similar responses and identified them as themes. I realize now that my preunderstandings that helped me make sense of the initial data also blinded me from seeing further. I had worked with so many men whose stories were so similar that I struggled with getting past what was familiar. I felt somewhat disappointed as I did not recognize any great surprises. Then I realized that I had yet to enter the backward arch of the hermeneutic circle. Thus, as Ellis (1998c) points out, “The uncovering is the return arch of the hermeneutic circle and the response to our inquiry. Thus, if no surprises occur, we either do not yet see what can be uncovered, or we have not yet approached the research participant or situation in a way that respects the way it can show itself” (p. 22). After entering the backward arch I was very excited about the themes and the uncoverings that became visible.

The analysis of the data from this study gave me answers to my research question. I now have a much better understanding of how these men experience their lives and how the themes of inefficacy, emotional attachment, self-care, and use of language are interwoven throughout their experiences.

Summary

The evolution of my research method has been guided by the principles of hermeneutics. The method was not clearly defined in the beginning but rather evolved as I gained a better understanding of the purpose of the study. Throughout the research I have been committed to approach the research from a caring and concerned perspective, always being aware of my preunderstandings.

Data collection included two interviews with each of the three men, observations recorded from the parenting group, intake forms, and conversations with the participants

and other service providers involved with the men. The transcripts were shared with the participants and then crafted into narrative portraits.

I used the hermeneutic circle to analyze the data, moving back and forth between the information gathered and my emerging understanding of the participants' experiences. I considered my own preunderstandings and fore-structure as a researcher to enter the hermeneutic circle. My own experiences and reactions became an important part of the study. At the same time my interpretations were based upon the words of the participants.

Chapter 4

NARRATIVE PORTRAITS

Jordan's Story

Jordan Bennett is a man looking for answers—answers to his past, to his present, and to his future. He is struggling to make sense of his world and the people in his life. His persona can switch from aggressive to empathetic as he endeavours to replace old tools with new ones, creating a new self-identity. A range of emotions can flicker across his face, visible to everyone except Jordan. Being aware of his feelings is one of the new tools that has challenged him the most. Chaotic, abusive, and confused would be appropriate descriptors of Jordan's life, a life he doesn't want for his children—but that cycle has already begun.

Jordan Bennett was raised in a small religious community in southern Alberta, the only boy in a family of five children. His childhood is like a blank slate; he cannot recall many early memories. There is a strong sense of sadness and loss associated with his younger years. "There's a bit of pain there that I feel." What he does remember is not happy. Jordan's father was an alcoholic, a very angry and abusive man. His mother was the peacemaker in the home, trying to deal with not only the present abuse but her own history of sexual abuse. Keeping the abuse a secret became the main focus of Jordan's life and led to feelings of isolation and shame. Many of Jordan's memories are filtered through the eyes of friends and relatives: a babysitter who remembers Jordan's dad threatening her with a knife, blood spilled on the kitchen floor; his sister who remembers their father not wanting to be touched because his boots were newly polished and his suit neatly pressed. Jordan just remembers the empty feeling from not having a father present

to play sports or to wrestle or just to be with. He is now left with feelings of confusion about his behaviour during his second marriage. Was it that bad that his partner had to leave? It certainly wasn't as bad as his father's or even the neighbour down the street. His past often becomes his present.

The bond formed between a child and his parent is crucial for healthy development. It teaches the child how to trust, how to learn control, and how to identify feelings. For Jordan this bond was not very strong, and as a result he experienced problems in his youth. At 15 he was incarcerated for murdering a man. As a result of his actions he feels he will live with feelings of guilt for the rest of his life. For the next little while his life became a blur. He was required to attend two 60-day psychiatric assessments because he was unable to show any emotion; he was unable to cry. He then became an adult who also carried the label of a psychopath and consequently asked himself, "Who am I?"

Jordan's troubles did not end with his youth. He has been married twice and in both relationships there has been domestic abuse. Jordan became the father of six children during his second marriage, two girls and four boys. Though he did not want the abusive cycle to continue, the patterns were already there. Jordan's life was fraught with fear and unpredictability, and at times so were the lives of his children. Jordan saw his children as an extension of himself, and their mistakes became his. He felt his role as a father was to correct these mistakes, through fear and punishment. As a result of his actions, Child Welfare became involved twice. The first time the file was closed because he and his partner were separating; the second time his access to his children was denied. The children who were so important to him were no longer there. The children who were like "old suitcases," always hanging around, now were absent. His only contact with

them had to be shared with a stranger--a supervisor who decided how a father should behave. Not only were his visits supervised, but also his phone calls and the letters he sent his children. His home that was once filled with the bustling noise of six children became silent. He was alone for the second time, the second marriage that failed. The thought of being on his own evoked feelings of sadness and fear that, at times, overwhelmed him.

Jordan has struggled with understanding the reason for Child Welfare involvement. Why were they involved now--when he has taken steps to change his behaviour, when he has acknowledged his abusive behaviour towards his children? He knows now that he has had difficulty allowing his children to express their feelings. He has not allowed them to cry because he couldn't cry; crying was not okay in his home. He knows now that some of his behaviours have instilled fear in his children, and for that he feels a great deal of remorse. However, he is puzzled that his partner left him, as his behaviour, to him, did not appear any worse or much different than that of his neighbours. He is also puzzled about the good times he shared with his children. "Don't those times count?" is a question he has asked himself over and over again.

Jordan wants to be there for his children; already he is seeing history repeat itself as his oldest son has been placed in a group home for abusing his younger siblings. After experiencing a childhood void of a father figure, Jordan takes his role as a father very seriously. He believes a father's role is to guide children and teach them the difference between right and wrong. He is worried about how he can accomplish this if he is only seeing his children once a month and having his every movement and every word scrutinized by strangers. Jordan has a few worries these days about his children: how his past behaviour has affected them, how a custody battle may affect them, how the courts

may take away the little time he has with them, and how someone else may assume the role of father for his children.

Jordan Bennett is a determined man. He is not about to give up in spite of adversities he has encountered, the ongoing legal costs, a child welfare system that does not seem to acknowledge his importance as a father, and a society that does not seem willing to recognize the changes that have occurred. He continues to try to better himself through courses and is persistent in tacking a welfare system that will not support his ability to change. At times he feels frustrated and helpless, yet he continues his journey in rebuilding a healthy relationship with his children. He hangs on to his hopes, especially during the tough times, and envisions a future that will recognize the importance of his role as a father.

Jeff's Story

Jeff Taylor is a man who is noticed, whether in a crowded room or when he is spending time on his own. His smile lights up his entire face and he engages very easily in conversation. He is also a man who does not hide his tears when he is sad or his laughter when he is happy. He appears to thrive on learning and often carries a notebook for recording important information. He has a strong desire to be a good father and enjoys spending time with children.

Jeff was raised in the United States in a small religious community, the second-oldest of five children. He recalls his childhood as quite normal, with family outings, church gatherings, and the usual sibling rivalry. He has wondered if his quick temper was inherited from his mother who was also quick to anger. Jeff's father, on the other hand, was more passive, often on the outside looking in. Nevertheless, he felt quite close to his parents until he became a teenager and then felt the need to rebel, distancing

himself from his family. During his early adolescence he encountered abuse in its most hideous form: he was sexually abused by a friend of his older sister. He remained silent, carrying within him the shame and guilt he felt about the incident. He questions whether the problem he has with his anger stemmed from the sexual abuse.

Jeff is a young man in his mid-twenties, yet already he has been married twice and is a father to two sons and two stepdaughters. His relationships have been very different; his first wife was very quiet, not willing to talk about feelings, and his second wife was verbally abusive. His two sons and one stepdaughter live in another province. Looking back, Jeff now sees the warning signs that occurred during his second relationship, signalling him to be cautious, to move slower. His parents had seen the signs also and had tried to warn him, but he continued with the relationship even though it caused a rift with his mother and father. The pain he feels from losing this relationship hurts and, at times, seems endless. He misses his stepdaughter and worries about not having the opportunity to say a proper goodbye. He wonders how she is doing. Does she understand why he is no longer there?

To deal with the hurt, Jeff has decided to look after himself, get to understand who he is, improve his self-esteem, and learn how to be the best dad he can be. He has been in counselling for a few years and has found it helpful. When Jeff worked out of town, he read self-help books, always looking for a way to improve himself and handle his anger.

He realizes that his role as a father is very important and he wants to be a good role model for his sons. Already he is seeing behaviours in his older son that are frightening and he wants to help. He has offered to bring his son here to live with him, but his ex-partner has difficulty with that proposal. He sometimes wonders if moving

away was the right thing to do, but unfortunately he needed work and there was nothing available in his community.

Jeff has decided to help other children since his own boys are not accessible and is a cub leader, enjoying this activity immensely. He is determined to remain close to his children and phones frequently, trying his new skills long-distance. He remembers the good times he enjoyed with his sons, wrestling in the grass and playing games outside. They were different with him. Yes, they could be mischievous, but they didn't seem to have the problems they have now. He wonders if they have appropriate role models as his ex-partner is in a new relationship. Many times he wishes they were closer so he could enjoy those times again.

Jeff is trying hard to pick up the pieces after his last separation, and sometimes his anger still gets the best of him--such as recently at work where a verbal dispute became physical. He knows he has to try harder to deal with his anger, especially when he is stressed.

He wants his children to be comfortable expressing their emotions, not keeping them bottled up inside and not feeling ashamed of their feelings like he did. He hopes to have some impact on them but realizes he has very little control or influence over things from this distance. Jeff feels there are still improvements he can make and is planning to return to school in the near future. Meanwhile, he is anxiously awaiting the summer when he will be reconnecting with his children and enjoying those special times again.

Mike's Story

Mike appears to be a very unassuming person, a quiet, soft-spoken man whose eyes light up when he talks about his children. Life seems to have treated Mike in a pleasant fashion until recently. He had the ideal dream, a home in an affluent part of the

city, three sons and a wife that stayed at home to raise their children. His ideal life has come to an end and Mike is trying to untangle the threads that have somehow become twisted.

Mike and his older sister were adopted at an early age and raised in central Canada. Mike would describe his home life as pretty normal: a loving mother and father who were able to provide a comfortable home for their children; a childhood that was filled with normal kid things--sports, birthday parties, and so on. Mike took these things for granted until he attended a group counselling program and began to hear about childhoods that he could never imagine, ones that were filled with abuse and abandonment. At times he felt a little defensive during the group about the amount of time spent revisiting these childhoods. His parents were good people, fair people, and he didn't want them blamed for his situation now.

He acknowledges that his parents got angry, especially his mother, and he "got it" a few times. Maybe they pushed him too hard and maybe no one talked much about feelings, but all in all it was a happy childhood. He feels he still has a good relationship with his parents. They have visited back and forth during the years even though they can only be together for a few days and then he feels his father starts treating him like a child. It was agreed by both that his parents would visit relatives in Vancouver and come back for the remaining few days of their holidays.

Mike thinks his parenting style is similar to that of his parents except maybe he rescues his sons more. His family life was quite different, however, as he was never available for family activities. He worked shift work and always had to be on call. A typical picture would include Mike waiting at home for a call to work while the rest of his family were enjoying an outing. They often returned to find their father still waiting for

that call. He did participate in the everyday activities, such as changing diapers and feeding his young sons. He often wonders if his work schedule had been more accommodating to family life would his situation be the same now.

His family life came to an abrupt halt one morning when his wife asked for a temporary separation and he moved out of his home. Now he was alone and wondering how he was going to manage. It occurred to him that he was becoming very angry and, not accustomed to feeling this way, he decided to search out help. He was keen to learn new ways of dealing with his anger and was amazed at how much new knowledge he gleaned from his groups. He felt his self-esteem soared, he lost 30 pounds, and started to like who he had become. He started to like the single life, meeting new people and even dating again.

The one concern he had was seeing so little of his children. His work schedule needed to change, so he changed positions even though it meant a decrease in his salary. He now had regular days off even though they were in the middle of the week. But he still struggled with the amount of time he was spending with his sons. He tried to be creative, but every time he approached his ex-wife with plans for seeing the children, they were squashed. He was feeling as if he was losing his children, that he was being pushed out of their lives. This thought was validated when he received a letter from a psychiatrist who has been working with his son. Mike was not informed about these meetings and felt quite hurt that he was not included. This feeling was compounded by hearing his older sons express their wishes to live with him. How should he react? Part of him has enjoyed being single, and having the children on a full-time basis would add more responsibility. He also realized that their mother would be devastated, yet he is concerned about the amount of time he has with them and the part he plays in their lives.

At times when he becomes overwhelmed with having to financially support two households, he has fleeting thoughts of leaving town. This almost became a reality after his last court appearance when the judge informed him he was to give his ex-partner 75% of his earnings. He wouldn't even have enough income left to pay his rent.

Mike's battle continues, but in spite of all the adversity he wants to be the best dad he can. The little time he spends with his children is precious and he has been persistent in trying his new parenting skills. The light in his eyes that was close to burning out is shining brighter because his children have commented on the changes they have seen. The words, "I noticed you were different," encourage Mike to continue striving to be included in the lives of his children.

Chapter 5

THE JOURNEY

*The longest journey is the journey inward,
for him who has chosen his destiny
has started upon his quest for the source of his being.
(Dag Hammarsjold, cited in Fishel, 1988, p. 19)*

In the beginning the river was small. The young paddler was able to manoeuvre his canoe through the waters. At times, he encountered small rapids and rocks which often left his canoe with dents and scrapes. He learned to rely on himself and usually was able to stay safe.

Sometimes he noticed groups of paddlers travelling together, helping one another overcome the waters. He made several attempts to join one of these groups but he never quite fitted in. So he continued on his journey, travelling mostly alone, trying to conquer the river.

As time passed, the young man noticed the river getting larger and the rapids that he encountered were more treacherous. The rocks loomed perilously in his path. The strategies he had used in the past seemed to land him in more difficulties. The current was fast and powerful and drew him in with frightening strength. It pushed his canoe closer and closer to the rapids that he had previously heard in the distance. No matter how hard he tried to gain control over his direction, he felt powerless to change his course. With the rapids fast approaching, he thought the only option was to hang on tight and go with the raging river. Holding his breath and closing his eyes, he felt himself going over the edge into the dark, swirling water. Gasping for air and frantically trying to keep his head above water, he fell deeper and deeper. “What will become of me?” he

asked as he plunged head-first into the water. Time seemed interminable while he was in the maelstrom, though he knew in reality that it was only a short time. His apparent powerlessness left him shaken. He slowly opened his eyes and found himself at the bottom of the canoe, floating aimlessly down the river.

Feeling very hopeless, the young man pushed his body upright to look over the edge into the river. Feeling such despair, he put his head in his hands and wept silently to himself. He drifted into a calm back eddy, and floated in a wide circle. He recalled other times that he had been caught in a backwater, going around and around, seemingly trapped until clumsy effort had finally enabled him to continue on, always seeming to be behind the other paddlers, always seeming to be in a futile panic to catch up. And this time he had even lost his paddle. At this moment, he was startled by a group of paddlers. The one who seemed to be the leader said, "Would you like to join us?" "I've always paddled alone," he replied, "I'm not sure I want to be part of a group." "It may seem difficult at first; it was that way for me." He wasn't sure if this was a good decision because it seemed so foreign for him to trust someone else.

There was no warning of what lay ahead. The river contained many more whirlpools. This was a strange way of handling a canoe, and at first he was only paddling on faith. At times, feeling like his new knowledge would never work and being faced with these new conditions, the canoeist felt overwhelmed. Nevertheless, by now he was feeling more comfortable and could ask for help, and called out to his group to help him continue on his journey.

He suddenly became aware of the different sights and sounds that occurred on his trip. It was almost as if he was seeing with new eyes and hearing with new ears. He still

encountered turbulent waters and dangerous rocks, but it seemed his new knowledge was giving him control over his journey.

One day, he noticed that the river had grown in majesty. It was awesome, but now he felt more at one with it. The paddler still continues his journey, branching out to explore new tributaries, but he often returns to what is familiar and important. There are still rapids to run, rocks to avoid, but he approaches them with confidence and has even learned to mend the scrapes and dents from earlier years. He no longer feels that he doesn't fit in and is often seen paddling with his friends.

Chapter 6

THEIR GROUP EXPERIENCE

The men also shared their experiences while they were involved in the group process. In keeping with the principals of hermeneutics I moved back and forth between what I observed during the group and the interviews. Reflecting on their group experience helped to deepen my understanding of their life experiences. This chapter will describe my interpretation of the participants' experience as they attended the 12-week parenting group.

I anticipated possible resistance of the participants to the group process. However, contrary to what might be expected with a population of abusive men, my observations were that there was no resistance, and that the men were willing to take part. What cannot be addressed by this study is the effect of the rapport and trust established between the group members and myself. My ability to separate the person from the behaviour allowed me to view these clients as fathers and fellow human beings, which may have allowed the men to feel safe enough to move forward. The three men involved in the study voluntarily participated in the men's parenting group. Though complete attendance was not mandatory, all the men attended 11 of the 12 sessions. They actively participated in the group exercises and volunteered examples of how they were trying their new skills. They openly asked questions when topics were presented that they didn't understand or agree with.

Introduction

During the first session, participants decided what guidelines were needed to provide a safe group environment that would allow people to share their experiences. An

introductory activity was planned for group members to get to know one another. Jordan introduced himself to the group as a father of six children, who after two failed marriages, was living on his own. He explained to the group his involvement with child welfare and his struggle with visiting his children. He also mentioned his participation in the Sheriff King's men's treatment program. Mike introduced himself as a father of three boys who had recently separated from his partner of 20 years. He also mentioned his participation in the three phases of the men's treatment program. Jeff's introduction was quite a bit longer as he carefully explained his previous relationship with the mother of his two sons and his current relationship with a new stepdaughter. He also shared with the group his previous counselling experience and how much he was enjoying the phase one of the men's treatment program. Mike and Jordan reported feeling very uncomfortable in the first group, while Jeff said that he felt at ease. Jordan and Mike knew one another from a previous setting and Jordan said he felt a little more relaxed when he saw Mike enter the room. All the men reported feeling somewhat tense about being in a parenting class without women. Nevertheless, by the end of the 12 weeks, they recognized issues that they might not have mentioned, and wondered whether there would have been too many relationship issues that would have obscured the parenting issues had women also participated in the group.

Intake Information

It was important to obtain information on the beliefs and attitudes of the men about parenting at the beginning of the group. The men were asked to fill in an information package and gave the following replies to the questions:

- (a) The aspects of parenting I enjoy the most are:
- (b) The aspects of parenting I struggle with the most are:

(c) Topics I am most interested in discussing are:

They answered the questions as follows:

The aspects of parenting I enjoy most are: 1. Watching and sharing their successes; 2. Seeing their joy in learning new experiences; 3. Doing activities and teaching by example.

The aspects of parenting I struggle with most are: 1. Discipline and different parenting between partners; 2. Stopping them from hitting one another and getting them to share; 3. My selfishness, how to get them to share their feelings, how to get them to talk to me.

Topics I am most interested in discussing are: 1. How to reassure the children that I love them, how to respect them, how to have empathy; 2. Raising self-esteem and teaching compassion; 3. Positive discipline, communications skills, seeing the world through their eyes.

In most parenting groups that I facilitate, it is very common for parents to identify getting control over the children as a topic for discussion. This was not an issue for this group of men. They seemed more focussed on repairing and healing their relationships with their children.

Perceptions

The goals of the session regarding perceptions were that members will understand that perceptions are unique and are based on experience, therefore their children may have different perceptions from their own. Through the use of questioning with “what,” “when,” “who,” and “why” questions, parents can understand their children’s perceptions. All three men stated that they found the topic of perceptions very helpful. Instead of reacting to the child’s misbehaviour, they now tried to figure out what was

going on in the child's head: What was he or she thinking? What was he or she needing? The work on perceptions gave the fathers opportunities to see the world through their children's eyes. It helped them to act instead of react. It also helped them to understand why their children's perception of their father's behaviour was not going to change quickly. They understood that if their children were previously afraid of them, they would have to prove their behaviour had changed by being consistent with their new behaviours. Through the use of questioning, the men were taught how to better understand their children's perceptions.

One evening during group, Jordan excitedly shared with the group his experience of trying to understand his son's perception.

I'm trying to figure what my kids are thinking, you know, is it a false goal? Why did John say what he did? When I talk to my son Brian I always say, "What's up, Brian?" He would say "The sky." So I wrote down my highlights of the week and told him. Then I asked him "What's your highlight? What made your week special?" He listed a bunch of stuff. You know, I was so pleased with myself.

Jordan's checkout feeling for that week was "excited."

Jeff commented, "I have found it very helpful to learn about the kind of questions you can ask to bring things out instead of using controlling and manipulative statements."

Mike expressed some frustration in his attempt to use this new skill: "I've tried using the questions we've learnt in group but the kids still respond with shrugs and little talking." Mike did persevere and was a little more successful by the end of group. "I'm also asking questions, you know, trying to get them to think for themselves."

Empathy

The goals for this session were for group members to gain an awareness of the importance of being empathetic with their children, and to give them the opportunity to practice this skill.

Empathy can be viewed as the most important building block in creating a healthy parent/child relationship. All three men involved in the study agreed with this statement. They had all been introduced to the topic of empathy during the men's treatment program. They recognized how valuable it was in adult relationships. They were willing to use it with their children even though they admitted that identifying feelings was difficult. Jordan stated: "Well, I find it very difficult to show them how I feel. It's been a little better since learning about empathy but I still find it hard. But before, I didn't allow them to cry because I didn't. I couldn't accept it."

Jeff thought that learning about empathy has helped, and recognizes that is the way that he would like to be treated and so would his children. He wants his children to be able to express their feelings so they don't get them "bottled up" inside, and do not feel intimidated by having a "wrong" feeling. Mike is also trying to encourage his children to be empathetic: "I try to get Kyle to think about what the other person is feeling."

During one group activity where group members were asked to give one another an empathetic response, each of the men was not only able to carry out this activity, but was able to assist other men in the program who were experiencing difficulty. The men often commented that it was hard to punish your child when you were trying to figure out what they were feeling.

Age and Stage Development

The goals for this session were for the group members to understand age and stage development in children, and to learn communication skills that would promote the feeling of capability within their children.

The understanding of the different developmental stages that children experience was new information for all the men. They participated in an activity where they had to draw a child and list the different characteristics of that age. They seemed to be able to identify the physical changes such as walking and talking, but not what was normal behaviour for that age. They came to realize that it was common for children between the ages of four and five to confuse reality with fantasy, so that what a parent might perceive as a lie was, in fact, the child's confusion; they then felt less afraid that their children would grow up continuing this practice. Their understanding of what was normal also enabled them to have realistic expectations for their children. They came to understand that young children are often unable to be empathetic, and that it is normal for a 5-year-old to say, "I hate you." Jordan found it helpful when adolescent rebellion was discussed, and could understand why his son was not communicative and wanted his own space.

This session enabled the men to separate the identity of their children from that of themselves. They came to understand that when a child fails to achieve a goal (e.g., toilet training), it was not a reflection on the parent. Another common concern was that of their children "acting out" in a grocery store: they did not realize that this is normal behaviour for a young child. I shared my experience of letting my own son scream in the grocery store, when he wanted the candy that had been strategically placed at his eye level. I informed the cashier that it was normal behaviour for a child to scream when he saw the

candy, and that I was going to let the entire store share this experience. The group members looked shocked at first, and then applauded my decision.

This session was also the beginning for the men to understand that children learn by making mistakes. Jordan commented in an interview with the newspaper that he had expected perfect children, and that he now realized how important it is to allow children to learn from their mistakes.

The second part of the session showed the men the differences between the builders and barriers of communication. Barrier behaviours are assuming, rescuing, directing, expecting, and expecting the child to rise to the adult level, while builder behaviours are checking, exploring, inviting, celebrating, and respecting. This concept is taken from the work of Glenn (1990) and Lott and Nelson (1995). The men were asked to identify which barrier they most commonly used. For Jordan and Jeff, it was directing and for Mike, rescuing. The men became emotional at times during this session because it was discussed how using these barriers lowers a child's self-esteem. Comments such as, "If only I had known about this stuff before," and "I hope my children can forgive me," began to be expressed.

Family Roles

The goal for this session was to help the fathers understand how children see themselves in the family. The initial focus is on how the fathers saw themselves in their own families of origin, with the roles that they assumed in order for their family to function. They watched a video that showed how children function in a home where there is family violence. The men were asked which role they assumed as children. Jordan felt that he was the responsible one, as did Jeff. They were often left in charge of younger siblings. Jordan became his mother's support when his father was drinking.

Mike wasn't sure which role fitted him the best. The next step of the exercise was for the men to identify the beliefs that corresponded with their roles. They were able to identify that they only felt that they belonged if they were needed or in charge. When processing the feelings associated with this role, they identified satisfaction, pride, anxiety, anger, and resentment. The discussion then became the loss of a large part of their childhood. They were then asked what the strengths of those roles were, and what needed to be changed. They named the strength of being responsible and helping out, but at times, felt it was hard to let go of that control. They stated that it was helpful to look at the strengths and weaknesses of each role as it enabled them to decide what they would like to have changed. The final step of the exercise was to assign a role to each of their children, and then to identify how they could help their children to relinquish that role. This was a difficult exercise for the men as it showed them how their behaviour had affected their children. Each man in the study completed the exercise but they were concerned about helping their children give up their roles as they didn't see them enough to do so.

Play

Play was incorporated into the parenting program to teach the men how to play with their children in a non-directive way. The goal of the session was to provide an awareness of how play and empathy build a healthy parent/child relationship. This appears as the fifth session in the manual but should only be implemented when a level of trust has occurred within the group. For this group, this session was presented on the eighth week.

Toys were distributed in the middle of the floor and each man was asked to choose one that he would like to play with. It may have been one that he had wanted as a child but had never received. The men were cautioned not to pick a toy that they thought

their child would have liked. They were then instructed to play with the toy in whatever manner they would like. Mike appeared somewhat uncomfortable with this exercise, and chose to play a board game. He stated that when he was a child, they played a lot of board games, and that was how he was comfortable playing with his own children. He could not get into the fantasy play with his children. He also stated that it was easier for him to be with his older boys versus the younger child. Jeff chose a 3D book and also said that his father didn't play that much with him as a child, but that he loves to play with his own boys. He added that he had no problem wrestling and getting into their fantasy world. In this session, often painful memories surfaced about play and the importance of it in a child's life. Some group members had no memories of playing with parents or being allowed to play. Jordan was away for this session but he commented the following week that he struggled to recall any childhood memories, and doesn't remember his father being involved at all. He remembered not being allowed to visit friends as his mother was afraid that his father's alcoholism would be discovered.

Punishment and Discipline

This session is presented to the group when it is thought that they have developed enough empathy and understanding of their child's world that they can see that punishment is abusive to their children. The session goals include providing information to members so that they will be able to distinguish between discipline and punishment, and can be aware of the long-term effects of each.

The first activity was to identify the feeling they felt most as children. They were then asked to make a list of all the things that their parents did to contribute to this feeling. Four dolls with expressive faces representing the feelings happy, sad, afraid, and lonely, were placed in various locations in the room. The men were asked to stand by the

doll with the feeling face that they could identify with as a child. Then they were asked to make a list of the activities their parents engaged in that reinforced this feeling. Jordan placed himself at the doll which appeared afraid, and his contribution to the list included severe punishment, put-downs, and drinking. Mike went to the “happy” doll and some of his reasons were that his parents were fair and that they were always there for him (especially his mother, who stayed at home when the children were younger). Jeff was away for this session.

The second part of the session had the members discussing the difference between punishment and discipline. At first there was confusion about the terms: the group members thought that “discipline” meant no structure or guidelines. After quite a discussion, they seemed to realize that when children are punished, they either rebel, retaliate, or have low self-esteem. Each of the men could recall a situation when they were punished, and the feelings associated with that event. They also recognized that the only learning that happened at that time was how to “get back” at their parents for the punishment that they had inflicted.

Spanking was also a topic discussed at that time. Mike had previously expressed his disbelief in spanking and stated that he never spanked his children. Jordan agreed that spanking did not teach children anything except to use violence as a way to solve problems, even though he had spanked his children. Also in this session, Jordan and Mike expressed remorse about some of their parenting tools: Jordan, for the physical and emotional abuse his children had suffered, and Mike, for the emotional abuse and for not always being there for his children.

When parenting styles were discussed in the session, Mike identified being a “rescuer” and never following through with consequences. This was different than when

he lived with his family because at that time he had a more authoritarian role. He stated that now, when he sees his children for such a short time, he wants them to be happy. Jordan had no problem identifying his style as authoritarian. Both men stated that they would like to adopt a more democratic parenting style.

Punishment and Shame

Shame is a topic that was very familiar to these men as they discussed it in their treatment program. In this session, the shame was more connected to their behaviour and how it had affected their children. It is important that each man take responsibility for his behaviour. Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this session to further shame these men. Through all the previous sessions, comments such as Jordan's were heard:

I am, unfortunately, too hard on myself. I guess I hate the very ground I walk on some days. I could have destroyed myself easy at times but then thinking that is the only thing I have left in me. I really try hard and seem to get nowhere; that's the uncomfortable feeling. I tried and tried, geez, and it didn't get me anywhere and I guess I will just try some more.

The group was encouraged to accept the past and to learn from their mistakes. The goals of this session were to have the group members understand the devastating effects of shame and to be aware of how mistakes are an opportunity to learn.

The activity for this session consisted of the members recalling what it was like for them as a child when they made a mistake. For the men in the study, the feelings associated with making a mistake were fear, anxiety, worry, and anger. This led to a discussion about what they learned from their mistakes and the consensus reply was "nothing." They were usually so busy trying not to get caught that they had no time to do any learning. Mike reported during his interview that his parents always seemed to want

him to do better. “They were always saying I could do better no matter how well I did. I guess it was a big issue because I heard it enough.” Jordan expressed discomfort about not remembering many details of his childhood. The session then focussed on how their parents dealt with mistakes, and they remembered many put-downs and being punished for doing something wrong. They were able to identify how this led to feeling shame and how that shame became internalized as a reflection of how they saw themselves. Even though this topic session is one that they were familiar with, it seems that they gained still more understanding of how shame has impacted themselves and their children.

The second part of this session explored the words we use when dealing with children, and how shaming these can be. A handout, “The Dirty Dozen,” from Glenn’s (1990) work, was distributed to the group and discussed. They reported using power, name-calling, lecturing, ridiculing, judging, and attacking as ways to get children to listen. The final activity discussed the “R’s of Recovery,” which showed a process used to make amends to their children. Jordan seemed quite interested in the chart and asked if I could bring a copy of it for the next session.

Punishment, Anger, and Responsibility

This session was a carryover from the previous one and was implemented over two weeks. Members were introduced to parenting tools that were non-punitive and that encouraged a healthy relationship between father and child. Positive time-outs were introduced at this time. Mike, Jordan, and Jeff had already been familiar with time-outs from their treatment program. When asked how to give children time-outs, they described various ways: to send the child to his or her room to think about the behaviour, or to sit the child in the corner for 15 minutes and then to have the child apologize. When asked of the reason for taking a time-out, they responded “so they could feel better and

get their anger under control.” I then asked if they would feel better if someone sent them to their room to think about what they had done. They instantly replied “No!” “So,” I asked, “Why would your children feel better?” The group discussed this among themselves for a while and then were able to understand that playing was the best way for children to feel better and that it was important for the children themselves to decide when they felt better. The responsibility of rejoining the activity should be the child’s. Letting go of their control did not appear to be an issue for any of the men in the study: they quickly grasped the new ideas. They were obviously frustrated by not being able to practice their new skills as often as they wanted.

To introduce the concepts of consequences, the men were asked to participate in a role play. Jordan and Jeff volunteered. Jordan played the adolescent who made an agreement to mow the lawn. Jeff played his friend. During the role play, Jordan was asked what he was thinking, feeling, and deciding. He replied: “I didn’t think I could get out of mowing the lawn because I had agreed in the first place. I was still a little angry because I didn’t want to mow the lawn but I was deciding I’d better get it over with so I could play with my friends.” The feelings of anger led to the discussion of how children do not always have the same priorities as adults, and that we shouldn’t expect them to get excited about their chores.

This session was also a time to review previous sessions on empathy, appropriate expectations, and understanding the child’s perceptions to decrease the parent’s anger. During the checkout of this session, Mike reported that his son had noticed a change in his behaviour: “My eldest son, James, asked where I was going on Tuesday. I told him ‘To my parenting group.’ That’s when he said, ‘I noticed you were different.’”

Separating the child's behaviour from who they are was also a topic discussed in this session. The group members had the opportunity to see the difference between saying "I don't like this behaviour" versus "I don't like you." Jordan and Jeff both commented at the next class how that was a powerful learning experience for them and was a tool they planned to incorporate into their tool boxes.

Punishment and Rewards

Many children who have experienced or witnessed family violence have an external locus of control. They look to the significant people in their lives to determine how they feel and how they should behave. This kind of behaviour has occurred because these children needed to be hypervigilant to the behaviours of people within their homes, especially their fathers. The goal of this session is to teach the group members how to encourage their children to develop an internal locus of control through the use of encouragement rather than praise or rewards. Group members struggle with this concept, as praise and rewards are used frequently with children in our society. After participating in a role-play where they had the opportunity to experience encouragement instead of praise, they thought that praise actually put a lot of pressure on children whereas encouragement gave them some concrete feedback that they could use again.

The remainder of this session was open to questions and answers from previous sessions.

Parent/Child Reflection

This is an activity developed from Lott and Nelson's (1995) "People Helping People" problem-solving activity. Each group member had the opportunity to role-play a situation involving their children where they thought that feedback would be helpful. Jordan and Jeff brought several situations to the group for their feedback and identified

through this activity that they were better able to understand their children's worlds, and what they were thinking and feeling. Both men took the feedback offered and returned the next week to report that they had experienced positive results.

Closing

For this exercise, the group decides how they would like to mark their final session. This particular group decided to have a barbecue. One man brought a fire-engine-red barbecue that was placed outside the building that housed the meeting. Each group member brought a dish, often one that he had created to share with the group. This session is filled with many emotions: happiness; sadness; and anxiety. Many of these men developed a connectedness with other group members and the group became a substitute for their families. It gave them an opportunity to talk about their children and the feelings associated with their past behaviours and hopes for the future. A common feeling among the men in the study was anxiety about not remembering what was discussed in the group. Mike commented, "I wish I had more time to put the stuff I am learning into practice and see how much I am learning." Jordan and Jeff have purchased the parenting tapes used in the course with the hope that they will refresh their memories and keep them on track. "So I take the handouts home and leave them there. I have every intention of reviewing them and hopefully, I will be able to do that with the parenting tapes." Jeff takes every opportunity to practice, even with adults.

The closing exercise involved making a web out of a ball of yarn and when each group member has thrown the ball, he must comment on one thing he is taking away with him. Mike commented that he was going to try his first family meeting on the weekend and hoped to make that a ritual when the children visit. Jordan stated that he was still using the mistaken goals and the "What," "Where," "When," and "Why" questions.

Empathy was the skill Jeff was using both with his children, in phone conversations, and with people at work.

Summary

During the 12-week parenting group the men embarked on journey of self-discovery. They learned new information about their past and how that is affecting their present lives. They were able to identify parenting skills that they wanted to change. They tried on a limited basis new approaches that allowed them to feel more successful in understanding their children's worlds. They were starting to feel more comfortable in their role as fathers.

Chapter 7

TOPICS

My initial data analysis began by reviewing the data from the interviews, observations, and intake forms. I followed Ellis's (1998b) suggestions of clustering the stories or statements according to reoccurring topics. Then I looked across the clusters to find common values and concerns. The topics then were identified and supported by the participants' own words. This chapter will present a detailed description of the topics gleaned from this research.

All the men participating in the study entered the Men's Treatment Program at the YWCA Sheriff King Family Support Centre with hopes of saving their marriages. In each case, the men had been asked to leave their home for a certain period so differences could be worked out in the marriage. Two of the marriages were terminating after a long relationship: 14 and 20 years. The third marriage lasted just 6 weeks. Each man talked about a different level of abuse in the relationship. Jordan openly admits to physical and emotional abuse in both his marriages: "I knew things were getting out of hand when she asked me to leave, so I decided to get some help. She decided that we should separate for a year, and then try again." Mike felt his anger escalate when his ex-partner asked him to leave home, and he entered treatment for personal growth: "About a year ago, Alice said she wanted a separation. It was at that time I was looking for a support group and a lot of groups out there did not have anything to offer during the summer. Someone suggested the Y, and I phoned because I was beating myself up for a lot of things in the marriage." Jeff was in counselling previously to deal with anger and feels that there was mutual abuse in this relationship. All the men were very upset at the thought of their marriages

ending: “I know after my first marriage I was left with nothing. It was very humiliating so I’m almost terrified of the same.” At the time of the study, none of the participants had returned to their partners.

An important focus of the Men’s Program and the Parenting Program is for the men to revisit the past. They become more aware of what was learned in childhood. They recall the happy memories and deal with the sadness of abuse and neglect. While they all take this opportunity, each man discovers something different: one man finds a childhood filled with lots of happy memories, and another finds a childhood he would rather forget, that he has tried unsuccessfully to put behind him. The men in the study begin to recognize that what they have learned in childhood is affecting their roles as fathers today. For each man, the time spent looking at the past is different. Several topics emerged during their interviews. Each man talked about his early childhood experiences, his relationships with his mother and father, the type of discipline used in the home, and the connections made from the past.

Early Childhood Experiences

Parents serve as primary role models in terms of what their children will do as they become men, women, and parents. The stories of the men involved in this research reveal a variety of experiences. One remembers a very abusive childhood: “My mother would have to go to the bar on payday to see if there was anything left so she could get groceries for us. I know my father was never there for me.” Another man remembers a happy childhood: “My parents were always true to their word, and fair. They are pretty sharp actually--not a lot of old ideas and values; pretty open-minded.” Another man remembers mixed feelings about his childhood: “There was no great contentions, but no overwhelming happiness either.”

In their attempts to understand themselves and their behaviours, the men have given thoughtful and sometimes painful attention to their early experiences and the messages they received as children. The fathers that reported having a happy childhood do not appear to struggle with power and control issues with their children. The man that experienced an abusive childhood admits to being abusive to his own children: "I have thrown things at them when they haven't listened." This same dad also recalls being abusive as a teenager: "I was barely 15 and just goofing around and unfortunately what I did caused the death of a man, and that's something I have to live with the rest of my life." For one father, who was sexually abused by a friend of his sister, the feelings of unhappiness intensified. It would appear that the men experiencing the most abuse as children were to carry that learned behaviour into the next generation.

Present Relationship With Their Parents

Most parents assume that their children will still maintain a relationship with them after they become adults. They picture the family outings with their new grandchildren. However, as stated by some of the men in the study, this is not always the case. Two of the men report having a fairly close relationship to their parents now: "I would say that I was really close to my parents until I became a teen and I found myself wanting to be out a lot. But shortly after that, when I was 20, I became close to my parents again and they are always a strong help to me." Another man comments on the visits with his parents: "My mother and I get along really well. My dad, well, after 2 days of being with him we run out of things to say." One man is estranged from his family of origin: "I phone my mother once a week or once every 2 weeks and I tried to talk to my dad but I know that unfortunately that if they passed away I--they're dead." During the group process all

three men identified wanting to have a close relationship with their children when they become adults; one where their children felt comfortable being with them.

Parenting Skills

Parenting skills have changed a great deal over the last 2 decades. What was accepted as normal when the men in the study were children now may be questioned. All three men remember spanking being used as a form of punishment. They also remember the feeling associated with the spanking: “Well, it puts fear into the child. I would end up being scared because I was going to get it.” All of the men identified wanting to parent differently than their parents. They stated that they wanted to use other forms of discipline than spanking. As one man states: “I don’t believe in spanking. I don’t believe it’s right or that it accomplishes much. There are other ways to do it.”

The men now see that their family of origin served as a training ground for patterns of parenting: “It has been interesting to see the connection in how things were dealt with when we were kids and how now, as adults, we do the same things.” One man thought that because he was pushed as a child, perhaps he gets too angry when his children don’t do the best they can. During the group sessions all the men appeared quite eager to learn other parenting skills--skills they believed would foster a better relationship with their children.

Emotional Functioning

Children learn how to identify and express their feelings by watching their parents. For the men participating in the study, feelings were not easily verbalized within their families of origin: “I would not say there was a lot of feelings expressed. There was a basic calmness, not a lot of contention but no overwhelming happiness either.” Another man reports: “Well, I don’t know, I always got the idea. I always knew their feelings

whether they came out and said it or not.” One man did not learn how to express his feelings as a child: “I guess I didn’t know how to be emotional; I taught myself not to cry.” The one feeling the men could identify in their families was the feeling of anger: “When they were angry, of course I knew about that.” Another man remembers his inability to express feelings: “I didn’t do much expression of feelings because I didn’t understand a lot about it.”

Relationship With Father

Some qualitative studies reveal that many men do not view their own fathers as positive role models (Daly, 1993; Ehrensaft, 1987; cited in Pleck, 1997). The men in this study recalled the relationships they had had with their fathers: “My dad, a lot of time, was just on the sidelines. He kind of sat back and took what happened. I don’t remember much play.” Another man remembers, “I know my dad was never there for me. He never got us involved in sports and things like that. I have few memories of him but my sister remembers him always saying, ‘Don’t touch me, don’t touch me.’” Play was not something they remembered experiencing with their fathers. One remembers being more involved with work-related activities but not with play: “As I got older, we spent less time together. I remember helping my dad out in the yard, digging with the shovel or painting the fence.” All three men’s reflections from their early childhood show struggles to connect with their fathers on an emotional level and this awareness brought a great deal of sadness to some of the men.

Relationship With Mother

Often mothers in families where there has been family violence are the primary caretakers for the children (Jaffe et al., 1990). Two of the men remember their mothers as the ones that got things done: “That would be due to the incentive from Mom--she would

take care of this or take care of that.” The same two men also remember their mothers’ anger: “I remember when Mom was angry or upset, she’d have a louder tone of voice.” The other man reports his mother in a much more passive role: a more subordinate role, one that tried to maintain some sort of harmony in the family. He also felt that his mother was ashamed of his alcoholic father: “She didn’t want us to go out. I never even knew my relatives.”

The man who witnessed the most abuse between his parents and experienced abuse himself carried abuse as a way of coping with conflict into his own relationships. Jordan commented: “I never realized that maybe a lot of anger goes back to my childhood.” Throughout childhood, these men were witnesses to different types of parenting, some more abusive than others. They grew up observing and experiencing these parenting styles and came to develop their own parenting style based on these observations, and what were familiar responses.

The Present

For Mike, Jeff, and Jordan, current situations are presenting them with many unexpected challenges. The family that once existed is no longer there, the financial security is gone, their relationships with their children have changed, custody becomes an important word, and single seems to be a better description than married. For all three men, these changes occurred suddenly and they were not prepared for them.

During the interviews, each man expressed his sadness about not being with his children on a daily basis.

You have a loss, yes. That kids are always there. It’s like a briefcase: you see it every day, you don’t care about it—but when it’s not there, you care about it.

Maybe that’s similar to the kids. They were there, yes. In the morning they

would get up and annoy me or what have you, but I could still give them a hug and play with them and have fun with them, but now they are not there. I used to have a house of seven to eight people, dogs, and what have you, and now I have nothing. So there is that sense of loss that I can feel.

Another man comments: "I don't see my kids often so when I do, I want it to be quality time." During the interviews there seemed to be a feeling of hopelessness at times for these fathers about being able to spend time with their children. "I'm hopeful that I will continue to see my children but sometimes I'm just not sure. Mike remarked at one point that he wasn't sure whether his children would want to maintain a relationship with him as they got older: "I see so little of them now." For one man the concern was what he would say to his children when they ask to come and live with him: "Well, I say, 'There are a lot of things to think about if that should happen--what about your mother's feelings, and how would you feel?'" All three men appeared to be dealing with an enormous sense of loss. They appeared to be struggling with unfamiliar feelings and it was very apparent that each father felt he had an important role in the lives of his children. Two of the men identified experiencing a great deal of fear about being alone. They had always been involved in a relationship but recognized now that part of their healing was about learning to live with themselves.

Visiting Their Children

Being with their children was important to each of these fathers. They spent regular time with them when they were part of the family. Now as that was no longer possible, visiting with their children was something they needed to negotiate with their ex-partners.

Two of the men had no formal custody arrangements and were experiencing many difficulties seeing their children. Mike was frustrated because his work schedule caused problems, and he was trying to be creative in making contact with his children. Since his marriage ended, he has changed his hours at work:

I'm working in the yard with regular days off. Two days a week, and not always the same days, but I've taken quite a pay cut to do it, but I can actually make plans. I still don't have weekends off so its tough to get a lot of time with them but I usually see them on their school holidays. This afternoon I'm picking them up from school. I have to work tomorrow morning, so I will take them home this evening.

Mike also talked about trying to call them after school. "I knew when they came home from school so I would phone them to see how their day was, but pretty soon they weren't answering the phone. When I asked them about it, they said their mother told them not to pick up the phone: it would mess up the answering machine." During the first interview, he was quite excited about going camping with his boys during the summer. The next time we met, he was unsure of those plans and he was told that his children would be visiting their grandparents.

Jordan also was frustrated with his visitations, but for other reasons. Child Welfare felt it was necessary for Jordan to have supervised visits. He was puzzled about the timing of the supervision. "Why now? Why, when I'm no longer in the home and when I'm trying to get all this? I could understand it when we lived in the Northwest Territories, but not now when I'm trying to change." Jordan talked about the need to be creative when he visits:

I drive for 2 hours and when I get there, I have no place to visit with my children except maybe the park. I find it very difficult to give all five children my attention at the same time. I have to know exactly what I'm doing when I'm going down to visit the children. I would be really afraid though they would say "You can't see the kids." It's very difficult to have someone watch you all the time. They even listen to my telephone calls with my older son. I used to write letters. For a while I wrote every darn week. I've written 70 to 80 letters to my children. You know, I write a page and a half to two pages, then she [the children's mother] read all my letters because she saw something she didn't like, so from that point on, she started to read them. If she didn't like them, she threw them away, so I discontinued that.

Jordan also expressed frustration with the supervision: "I want to know how I'm doing but I never get feedback. No one tells me anything and I don't know what to change." After the conversation with Jordan, I phoned the Child Welfare worker to ask about visits. The worker informed me that there were concerns about Jordan's ability to handle five children at one time. He also expressed concerns about the ending of the visits. It appeared that Jordan seemed agitated as the visits were coming to an end. When I spoke with Jordan about this, he informed me that he had difficulty bringing the visits to a close: "The children get so upset when I tell them we have to go," he stated. "If I looked agitated, I don't mean to, I just felt sad." After that conversation, Jordan and I discussed other ways to end the visit. He seemed willing to try something different. Jordan has written a letter to the Child Welfare worker requesting feedback on his visits.

In Jeff's situation, visitation has been settled by the court. When he lived in Winnipeg, he visited with his children every second weekend and since moving to

Alberta, the boys visit him in the summer. He spoke about having his boys come to live with him: “It would be quite exciting, actually. I had tried for about 2 years to get my oldest son to come with me because he was having a lot of difficulties. At times, when he was most difficult, my ex-partner would say ‘You can take him,’ but it never materialized into anything concrete.”

For all three men, it appears that being a father doesn’t give them the right to see their children on a regular basis. They feel that they are fighting uphill battles, and then settle for whatever time they can get. They don’t hold much optimism that the courts will help alleviate this problem. Rather, they are afraid that they will lose what time they have. Jordan talks about what he would like to see happen: “Well, I want to be able to see my kids once a month, have them on Christmas for the afternoon, on Boxing Day, and see them once for a whole week.” At one point, Jordan talked about having the children come to live with him. Mike seems to struggle mostly with maintaining his connection with the children: “If things continue this way, maybe they won’t want to have a relationship with me as they grow older.” According to the fathers, their children question why they can’t be with them more. “The young ones say, ‘Why don’t you come? Why don’t you come visit me?’ I don’t know what to say, so I just say ‘I’m sorry, I just can’t visit right now,’ and I feel stupid for saying that but I think it’s best.” There seems to be a sense of helplessness associated with their rights to see their children. It has been argued that a “pro-fathering” movement in the United States has disempowered mothers in brutal custody battles since it is assumed that fathers will receive custody more often than mothers. Although this can be the situation in many cases, the stories of these three men reveal a different scenario. They appear to have developed a helplessness about their visitation with their children.

Their Role as Father

The role of fathers has changed greatly over the last 2 decades. Their primary function was to be the breadwinner in the family. Since the 1970s a new role emerged, one labelled “the nurturant father.” It is now expected that fathers do more than put the supper on the table; they also interact with their children (Lamb, 1997). Research has shown that the amount of time fathers spend with their children often depends on the memories from their own childhood--choosing either to compensate for the lack of interactions with their own fathers or to emulate them.

The father’s role seems important to each of these men. They all expressed the desire to play a role in the lives of their children:

The father’s role is to teach and guide their children. I know somebody pointed out that kids need to have their dads in their lives ’cause kids without dads, you know, boys especially, if they don’t have their fathers in the house in some cases they turn into criminals.

Another man says, “I hope I have enough impact on them they can learn the tools to be healthier, that they can understand themselves.” Mike feels his role as a father is to

. . . help raise my boys as responsible people, to guide them, to teach them to understand there are lots of choices to be made to take responsibility and consequences for your choices, and hopefully have good morals and be respectful.

I figured that is the biggest role of being a father and hopefully I can be a part of that.

The men talked a lot about the father’s role being that of a teacher and guide, but they also mentioned the importance of playing with their children, showing love and affection, and being a role model. Jeff remembers the family times: “I made a lot of effort for us to

have family times. We went on a lot of trips together as a family.” Mike talks about taking his children swimming at the pool in his apartment building. “Swimming is something I really enjoy doing with my children.” Jordan has to plan his visits with his children but often tries to spend individual time with each child. Even though that is a role they would like to have now, they don’t appear to be involved in making the major decisions about their children’s lives:

The other day I received a letter from a psychiatrist at the hospital. I didn’t know anything about this--they were asking me to attend a meeting concerning my oldest son, James. It sounds like James has been seeing a psychologist, but I didn’t know anything about that either. You would think if he’s having problems that I should be involved.

Another man states: “I still care and love them very much. I want to do everything I can but I also know when I have no control over things. I tried to do the best I can, helping guide and direct them, though I don’t feel that I have a lot of influence.” Again, there seems to be a sense of helplessness about being more involved in the lives of their children.

For Jordan, the thought of another man replacing him as a father is extremely painful: “So she has a new boyfriend. Well, that’s up to her. I would be upset if he tried to be a dad. He can be maybe a father figure but he can’t be me. He can’t do the things that I can do. That’s my role.” The relationship these men had with their own fathers was not one they wished to have with their children, but perhaps this same pattern of relationship is doomed to be repeated. Skills and self-confidence have also been identified as necessary for a father to obtain in order to develop a closeness to their children (Lamb, 1997). As the men learned new skills to communicate with their

children they seemed to forming a closer relationship with them. “We are going to have our first family meeting this evening. I think it is a good time because I know that when we sit down for dinner we actually, all four of us together, we joke around and whatnot. It’s a pretty special time.”

The men have demonstrated through their stories their ability to play, to teach, and to guide their children. Nevertheless, I believe that they also see themselves in a context that places little importance on the father’s role.

Their Relationships With Their Children

The men appeared to experience difficulty talking about their relationships with their children. When asked the question, “How close do you feel to your children?”, they all asked, “Now, or when I lived with them?” They spoke about being families. “I made a lot of effort for us to have family times together. We went on a lot of trips together as a family. After the separation, things changed. Having them on the weekends really kept a connection, but it was difficult not being there to help them with what was going on in their lives other than weekends.”

Jeff feels that, even though he doesn’t see his children often, he maintains a close connection with them. “I feel that I am as close as a father in the way that I care for them and love them and have that openness for them, as if I were there all the time.”

Mike feels closer to his two older boys than to his youngest child:

I haven’t spent as much time with my youngest, John, as he seems to have a harder time separating from his Mom. When I have the boys on a one-to-one basis I feel closer to them. They start opening up a bit more. James gets a little frustrated at times because he doesn’t like to talk about his feelings. I try to talk to all the boys about my feelings. It’s something I’m trying to do more of. I do

worry about the amount of time I have to spend with the boys and the part I play in their lives.

Mike also remembers being involved when the children were young: "Oh, I certainly changed my share of diapers. I was around a lot for the feedings." He also struggled with taking on the role of disciplinarian in the family: "It was expected of me." He reported that it was his job to act upon the rules that his partner determined.

Jordan feels quite distant from his children now. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning distant and 10 meaning close, he puts himself at a 3. He remarks that he wants to establish a relationship with his children, but he feels it's hard when he is not always around. "I guess it is more on how to make them capable, how to be more understanding, how not to demand that they be like you, how to learn how they can be themselves, and how you can be extremely respectful and understanding." Jordan remembers the time when the relationship wasn't good: "There were times when they didn't do things like I wanted so I have thrown things at them. They were never hurt enough to go to the hospital but there were bruises and I know they were afraid." He also remembered a time when he felt closer to his older son: "We were helping my Mom move and John said 'You know, I got little fears, Dad.' There are fears. I'm sorry, you can't undo the past." Jordan also felt that being the disciplinarian was one of his major roles in the family. He also questions whether a father could take on a more nurturing role. If social constructs demand that the father be the disciplinarian for both parents, a more broad and nurturing role may be more difficult for the father to achieve after a separation. Often a mother plays a role of interpretation in both directions of the relationship between a father and their children; possibly one more social tenet that affects the ability of fathers to relate to his children. Jordan admits that he still finds it difficult to show his children how he

feels. "It's been a little better since learning about empathy but I still find it hard. But before I didn't allow them to cry because I didn't, I couldn't accept it. Now I use the feeling statement."

Trying to be the nurturer and disciplinarian appears to be quite a challenge for these fathers, but a challenge they seem ready to pursue.

Children in the Crossfire

Each man talked in his story about the children being caught in the middle between the parents. It is not uncommon for children caught in the middle of parents arguing to feel responsible for the conflict. It's easy for children to feel "It's all my fault." This seemed to be an important issue for the men as described in their stories.

I phone my partner up and said, "Listen, the play is on this date. I'd like to come down and pick up the kids and have a weekend with them." "Oh, okay." So for five weeks I kept phoning. Every week I phoned: "What time, what time?" My partner was very distraught over this. We've been talking about this for 5 or 6 weeks. We finally arranged a day but then she said Leah had to be back a certain time or she couldn't go. So Leah was caught in the middle. If she agreed with her mother, then I would feel hurt; and if she agreed with me, her mother would feel hurt. So I said, "Fine." I brought her back and I thought that was the best thing to do. It didn't make Leah--it made me the chooser and it took a lot of pressure off Leah and we were able to spend a Friday night, all day Saturday, and come back on Sunday.

Another man commented that he and his ex-partner agreed to try their best to keep the children out of the disagreements. These stories differ greatly from the one told at the Duluth center in Minnesota about a dad who wanted custody to get back at his ex-partner

(Arendell, cited in McMahon & Spence, 1995). Each man in this research seemed willing to avoid putting the child in the middle and, instead, to put the child's needs first.

Summary

The stories that evolved from this research provides one way of viewing and understanding the experience of fathers who have a history of domestic abuse. The patterns and topics derived from the stories attempt to describe their journeys of change. Each man's journey began early, as a little boy who was raised to be tough, raised to be a little man, taught to deny any feelings of vulnerability. They carried these patterns from early childhood into their roles as fathers. They saw these roles as ones that involved controlling the people in their lives. Finally, a situation arose that was out of their control and the only option available was for them to take a long, hard look at their own behaviour. During treatment, they learn how to take responsibility for their abusive behaviours and to learn healthy alternatives. They become aware of how their behaviour has affected people they love. The first leg of their journeys involved their own healing from the abuse they experienced in their own childhoods. Their journeys continue with the healing in their present relationships, especially with their children. They struggle with the shame they feel when remembering their behaviours towards their children. They often feel as though they are on a roller coaster ride experiencing extreme highs and lows, and, finally, their journeys take them to a place where they are more comfortable with their roles as fathers. Nevertheless, their journeys are ongoing, and we leave them at a place where they are experiencing many challenges around visitation and staying involved in the lives of their children. As they travel through this change process, their stories paint a picture of hope for mothers and children that have experienced family violence. This picture allows fathers to recognize the importance of their roles as fathers,

taking action to ensure their involvement will have a positive effect on the lives of their children.

Chapter 8

THEMES

My study of understanding how men experience their lives divides itself naturally into three sections: how they experienced their past, how they experience the present, and their hopes for the future. Using the forward arch of the hermeneutic circle along with my preunderstandings and fore-structure, my initial analysis consisted of clustering the stories around similar topics. Upon further deliberation I reflected upon what Ellis (1998b) refers to as the significance or meaning connecting the topics which led me to understand the stories at a thematic level rather than a topical level. van Manen (cited in Aitken, 1994) refers to themes as “knots in the webs of our experience, around which certain experiences are spun and thus experienced as meaningful wholes” (p. 47). As I reread my notes I discovered more themes some of which came as a total surprise. In this chapter I will describe the five key themes that were discernible from their talk, supporting my interpretations with the men’s words. The chapter concludes with a discussion around the uncovering or findings of the study.

Inefficacy

In examining the men’s talk about a number of the topics a pervasive theme appears to be their experience of inefficacy. A person’s self-efficacy determines the power they believe they have to produce a desired change, the ability they have to control outcomes. Power and control are words commonly associated with men who have been abusive in their relationships, yet a dominant theme throughout this study is the inefficacy these men feel about their lives. In the following subsections I will outline the manifestations of the themes of inefficacy in the topics discussed.

Inefficacy in Childhood

It starts early in their childhood, that inability to have control over what happens to them. The most extreme example of inefficacy in this study was demonstrated by Jordan. He expresses great discomfort when speaking about the childhood which holds very few memories for him. His memories are few and scattered and are often relayed through the eyes of relatives or friends. "I can remember little tidbits . . . there's a bit of pain I feel there." Loss of childhood memories serves as a coping skill for adults unable to deal with the trauma they have experienced as a child (Terr, 1994). Unfortunately the inability to remember often promotes profound feelings of powerlessness. Mike also experienced this inefficacy when he remembered the way his parents pushed him to achieve and not feeling he could ever meet their expectations: "They were always saying I could do better." Jeff's inefficacy resulted from being sexually abused as a child and keeping this a secret into his adult years. This is another strong message about how little control you have as a child over what happens to you. Children who are sexually abused often take responsibility for what has happened to them, creating more shame around the incident.

Inefficacy in Present Relationships

Their childhoods began with the feelings of inefficacy and continued into the present. All the men at the time of the study were separated from their partners at their partners' request. In the beginning they believed the separation was temporary and reconciliation would be possible. As time progressed it became evident they would not be going back to their homes. Each man appeared to come to terms with their situation but struggled with their inability of not seeing their children regularly. Even though each of these fathers expressed a desire to visit with their children there were many obstacles that stood in their way.

Jordan's visits were supervised by Child Welfare and he never received any explanation why. He has only been able to see his children once a month and is afraid of losing that time. "I was really afraid they would say, 'You can't see the kids.'"

Mike also experiences a lot of frustration with his situation. He has tried to be very creative in keeping contact with his children, by phoning them after school and arranging camping trips during his days off. He has constantly encountered resistance from his ex-partner, such as the phone being unplugged when he calls or pre-arranged visits being cancelled at the last minute. At one point Mike was ready to give up completely. He was ordered by the judge to pay his ex-partner 75% of his salary even though he was already paying support. Mike felt so desperate at that time he thought his only option would be to leave the city.

Jeff's experiences are a little different because his children live quite a distance away. His contact occurs over the phone and through yearly visits. He would like to have his children live with him and gets quite excited when his ex-wife informs him she can't deal with his older son and it's Jeff's turn to parent. Unfortunately these plans are never completed and Jeff is left feeling disappointed.

Inefficacy in Future Relationships

This feeling of inefficacy also projects into their future relationships with their children. They are frustrated with their inability to use their new parenting skills and would like to have more opportunity to practice. They worry about their role as a father and how much influence they will have with the children. Jeff describes his concern about the influence he has on his children: "I try to do the best I can, and try to help them and direct them but I don't feel I have a lot of influence on them." Little has changed for these men concerning their relationships with their children over the past year. Jordan's

visits are still supervised and he still has not received any feedback on what he needs to do differently. Mike has chosen not to leave the city but still struggles with consistent visits. These continued experiences leave the men feeling hopeless and helpless about their ability to strengthen their relationships with their children.

Emotional Nurturance

Young children lack the ability to identify and express their feelings. An important role of a young child's parents is to validate and role model the identification and expression of feelings. In the childhood homes of the men participating in this study, expressing and validating feelings did not occur. As a result they have all experienced difficulty in understanding their feelings as adults. Jordan especially has experienced severe consequences because of the inability to express his feelings: "I spent three months in incarnation . . . because they said I didn't cry." He then transferred this inability to show emotion to his children: "I didn't allow them to cry because I didn't." During group treatment Jordan as well as Mike and Jeff have learned to express their feelings. They have all identified how difficult it was to learn this skill but also now realize what a powerful tool it can be.

Emotional Attachment

The picture presented about men who have been abusive does not usually include the emotional attachment they feel for their children. Instead it is a picture of emotional distancing, one far removed from the daily activities of the children. Their role is usually seen as one of authority. All the men in this study demonstrated the emotional attachment they felt towards their children. This involvement began when their children were babies. As Mike reports, "I've changed my share of diapers." As mentioned in Chapter 7, they have consistently engaged in playful activities with their children such as

swimming, camping, and playing board games. When they describe these playful interactions their facial expressions denote a sense of excitement. Jeff describes his time with his children on the weekends: "I had a house out in the country, 4½ acres. We had a couple of sheep . . . so we had a great time together." Mike enjoys swimming with his children at the pool at his apartment. Jordan struggles more with his visits as they are supervised and finding a place for the visit can be a problem. He invests a lot of time planning activities for the children: "Like Kelly, my youngest . . . I was able to entertain in a 3-hour meeting."

The Children's Emotional Attachment

Their children have also voiced their connectedness to their fathers. Mike's children have expressed a desire to come and live with him. He feels uncertain about this for a variety of reasons. He's not sure if they're saying this to please him and he also knows that his ex-partner would be very hurt if it happened. Jordan's children, too, have expressed their desire to spend time with him. "I like my dad and I want to spend time with him." Jordan also hears, "Daddy, why don't you visit me?"

Dealing with such issues raises many emotions for these men. As discussed more fully in the previous chapter, they often find they are required to put their needs aside to ensure their children are not caught in the conflict that still exists between them and their ex-spouses. What enables them to do this is their love and concern they feel for their children.

Personal Growth

Another theme common to all three men is the importance they attribute to their personal growth and how that influences their ability to change. Mike became involved in the Sheriff King programs because he realized that his self-esteem was not where it

should be. Mike has mentioned taking some of the courses over again because he has learned so much from them. Jeff also believes he has grown personally from participating in the programs: "It was very helpful. It helped me grow leaps and bounds" Jordan focuses on the need to change his self-talk in order to grow. If I have that self-talk, that leads me the way to make improvements I need to make. Maybe I'm not where I'd like to be but that doesn't mean I haven't made improvements"

Self-Care

As part of their personal growth each of the men identified the need to look after themselves physically and emotionally. Since his separation Mike identified losing 30 pounds. He now exercises regularly and is more aware of his eating habits. Jordan also exercises regularly and has become involved in drama which he finds emotionally very satisfying. Mike puts a lot of his energy in helping with Boy Scouts and would often attend group still dressed in his uniform.

Investing the time in their own personal growth, whether it be physical or emotional, was a new experience for each of the men. However, in a relatively short time they realized the change that was possible by paying attention to these needs. The men became involved in what Rorty (1982) describes as the two projects for human beings: "to take responsibility for our own continuing growth, and to contribute to solving problems in our community" (cited in Ellis, 1998a, p. 9).

Awareness of the Way They Use Language

The role of language plays an important part in a hermeneutic study. People use the "power of language to make new and different things possible and important--an appreciation which becomes possible only when one's aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternate descriptions rather than One Right Description" (Rorty, 1989, cited

in Ellis, 1998a, p. 9). The men in this study used language very differently by the end of the 12-week group. They compared this change to learning a new language. The change in their language began when they entered the parenting program. They were encouraged to refer to family members by their names, instead of “my wife” or “my children” which can denote ownership. They were also challenged when referring to women as “girls” or “ladies” instead of women. They soon became aware of how judgmental language can be. Jordan commented on this during the interview when he reflected on his thoughts of responding to his children about why he couldn’t visit as often as he wanted: “I don’t know what to say. I think to myself, “Because your mother’s a hag,” but that’s being judgmental. So I just say, “I’m sorry. I just can’t visit right now.” I feel stupid for saying that, but I think that’s best.” This abusive language was familiar to Jordan; he heard it when he was a child and continued to use it as an adult.

They learned to use language in an exploratory fashion instead of an authoritarian fashion. “Do this, do that” became instead “What do you need to do now?” Jordan proudly described in group one evening his successful attempt at engaging in a two-way conversation over the phone: “When I talk to my son Brian I always say, ‘What’s up, Brian?’ He would say, ‘The sky.’ So I wrote down my highlights of the week and told him. Then I asked him, ‘What were your highlights?’ He listed a bunch of stuff.” Jordan had been extremely frustrated when trying to communicate with his son. This conversation encouraged him to continue trying.

The men also became aware of the power of their words and how easy it was to use language to shame and hurt. They learned to comment on their children’s behaviour; “You are bad” became “I don’t like your behaviour.” All three men grasped this concept quickly and put it into practice immediately.

The language of love became easier and they often discussed how much easier it was to say the words “I love you.” At times they said words they didn’t fully understand or felt uncomfortable with. This was especially true when they tried to validate their children’s feelings. Empathy continues to be a struggle for Jordan as he still has problems identifying his own feelings.

Language in the Larger Context

When one reads about men who are abusive they are usually referred to as perpetrators, batterers, or wife beaters. Adults respond no differently than children when labelled; the label becomes who they are. The group experience became a time when they were able to see themselves out of that context. The language modelled by myself and my co-facilitator was always respectful and caring even when challenging certain issues. With time these men let go of the labels and saw themselves rather as men and fathers. Unfortunately society has not learned this lesson and the labels are still prevalent.

Uncoverings

When I began this research project I didn’t anticipate finding anything new. I had facilitated so many of these groups that I felt I could predict the topics and themes. In a hermeneutic study, when “no surprises occur, we either do not yet see what can be uncovered or we have not yet approached the research participant or situation in a way that respects the way it can show itself” (Ellis, 1998c, p. 223). As it took me quite awhile before I entered the backward arch of the hermeneutic circle, the uncovering of the findings eluded me. It was only by rereading the transcripts and reflecting on my preunderstandings was I actually able to identify surprises.

I had been aware for some time that fathers like the ones in this study often will not fight for custody of their children. It has always amazed me that they were willing to settle for inconsistent visits. I justified this by saying, "Lawyers are expensive, they don't have finances that would enable them to engage in a court battle." One of my uncoverings of this study was how the theme of inefficacy is so pervasive throughout their stories. They don't fight for custody because they don't believe they have any control over what happens to them. This theme was played out in their childhood stories, their present stories, and even spills over into their future hopes. This was indeed a surprise to me and will affect the way I work with these fathers. It will be important to include in the group strategies for them to learn about seeing themselves as having some control over the decision making with their children.

Another surprise I had not anticipated was the importance of self-care. I recognized their responsibility for personal growth but was surprised that it included a strong component of self-care. Each man had his own form of self care: exercising, being involved in Boy Scouts, and participating in a drama group. Self-care was part of the men's treatment program and they were encouraged to look after themselves as this was the first step in caring for others.

Summary

Through the stories shared by the men in the study, powerful and significant themes were uncovered--themes that one does not usually associate with men who are addressing issues with their own anger. Their stories allow us to see another side of who they are and how they see their role as a father to their children. Their stories offer hope as in their journey they become aware of their use of language, their emotional attachment to their children, and their ability to parent differently.

Chapter 9

MY JOURNEY

As I write and reflect upon the stories of the men in this study, I recognize that I also have embarked upon a journey of my own: a journey that is full of my self-discoveries and awareness.

My journey began 4½ years ago when approached by a man in Phase Three of the treatment process. Up to that point I had little experience or desire to work with men who had been abusive to their families. I came into contact with them occasionally as they brought their children to groups. Sometimes, a man would participate in a parenting group, but that was rare. When a father did attend, I presumed the worst: that he was there to antagonize his partner or to gain custody of his children. I remember thinking to myself as one such man brought his child to group, “You slimeball, how could you treat your children the way you do?” Ultimately, I always felt that the family would fare better without the presence of the father in the home.

After deciding to facilitate this men’s parenting group, I was faced with a situation that was very unfamiliar to me. I became quite concerned about my safety and was cautious about the facility I used for the group. I made sure that there was another group occurring on the same night at the same time, so I wouldn’t be alone with these men. I was very careful in confronting the group members for fear that their anger would be turned against me.

What a surprise it was to me when I discovered that I didn’t need to worry about my safety, that the men might be angry but not with me, but that they were angry with themselves and about their behaviour towards their children. There was a great deal of

laughter and some nights, a cloud of sadness and tears. The men in this first group seemed anxious to hear new ways to parent and would report back the following week their successes and frustrations about trying these new strategies. They were the experimental group, and the program has certainly experienced some growing pains since then. That group was my initial learning of how to confront and challenge in a respectful way; how to facilitate without judging; to look at the whole picture; and, most important, to see these men as fathers, not as perpetrators or batterers.

To my surprise, I also noticed changes taking place: fathers taking responsibility for their behaviour and wanting to build better relationships with their children. For each man, the process was his own: some took small steps and some took huge steps on their journey of change. At first, I was very sceptical and didn't believe this change could be happening. I witnessed the pain of a father who hadn't seen his little girl in over a year because he didn't want to upset his ex-partner any more. I witnessed his reunion with his daughter and saw this man, who didn't believe he could be a good father, show love and empathy to the little child. Each man had his own story and, as their stories continue, I am still privileged to share some of them.

I have described my first group experience with these fathers. The next eight groups have shared their stories, and I have experienced similar feelings. Not all the men chose to stay, some struggled with letting go of control and chose to leave the group. One man who didn't believe all the concepts taught in groups stated one night: "I can't believe it: I found myself defending you at work today! I was saying 'But Jean said . . .,' I don't know, maybe I'm buying into this more than I thought." Another man who challenged many of the teachings finally came to the understanding that never being told

that he was loved by his parents has affected him as an adult. Some men take large steps, some small, some, baby steps.

I felt hopeful when the men finally were able to say, “That was abuse. He [the father] shouldn’t have done that to me.”

The content of the program also changed over the four years though it was always based on Adlerian theory, and the main goal was to have the fathers understand the world through their children’s eyes. I soon discovered that if I tried to teach them discipline techniques at the beginning, they used them to get back at their children. So the first five sessions revolved around understanding their children’s worlds through feelings. I remember one father stating in group “It’s really hard to hit your children when you are trying to figure out what they are feeling.”

Many of these men were raised in families where it wasn’t okay to feel sad, or cry. The only feeling that was safe to express was anger, and soon, anger became the way to solve all problems. I saw the confusion they encountered as they had to revisit their pasts and challenge everything they knew. I reflect back on the excitement I would feel as each man slowly made this connection. Many evenings I felt exhausted after a long 8-hour day and I had to face a 2½-hour group. Undoubtedly, by the end of group, I would feel rejuvenated and excited about what had taken place in that session.

I watched as the group became very connected, and I was included in this closeness. There were many jokes shared within these sessions: how I always liked to sit in the same chair, how they could tell when I was getting excited about a topic. During all the four years, I was always treated with much respect and it was not uncommon to hear, “Thank you for offering this group.”

Some men were very angry at the beginning, but often these were the men who struggled most with the ending of group. One father in particular stands out as I remember his participation in a closing exercise where we used yarn to form a spider's web. The group was asked to share something they brought to group and something they were taking away. He fought to hold back tears as he said, "I brought my experiences and I am taking away hope." This young father had been horribly abused as a child and this was his first time sharing that experience. He was feeling hopeful that soon, after 10 months, he would see his children again. After the exercise was completed and each group member was holding tight to his part of the web, we all sat silently as if no one dared to let go of his corner. I finally stood up and released my corner first, and the others slowly followed. This same young father came up to me later and said, "You know, I was having a hard time letting go of the yarn." I replied, "Yes, I know." For many of these men, the group became the substitute family and Tuesday evenings became a special night. "I look forward to the next session. In fact, I can't wait for Tuesday to come. I'm not sure what I'm going to do when the group is over."

Some of these men were the ones I struggled with at the beginning after reading their intake files. As I read about their abusive behaviour, I could feel the anger rise within me, and I would question whether I could work with these men. Could I let go and see them as fathers, not as abusers? The power of hearing their stories played an important part in my letting go. I was able to separate the men from their behaviour, just as I encourage them to do with their children. I never forgot what their pasts included but, instead, worked with them to help them change the present.

My feelings of anger towards them changed to anger towards a society that doesn't believe these men can change. I remember the indignation I felt after one of the

men responded to a request from a local newspaper to participate in an article that would enable the public to hear about how this change occurs. This father voluntarily used his name and even allowed the interviewer to publish his picture. He took responsibility for his abusive behaviour and admitted he had hit his children, but now recognized it was wrong. He further explained how he now saw his children as separate from himself and that allowing them to make mistakes was an opportunity for them to learn. His Child Welfare worker unfortunately took his comments out of context and sent him a letter informing him that he could not see his children unsupervised after admitting to hitting his children in the newspaper. This worker, like so many professionals, failed to see that these men can make changes.

As I near the end of this thesis, I recognize how grateful I feel to have been able to embark on my journey. I remember when I believed men who were abusive could not change, and how bleak the future appeared for these families. Now, as the eighth group session comes to an end, I feel optimistic about the futures of these fathers and their children.

Chapter 10

DISCUSSION

The current study sought first to gain a better understanding of how fathers who have been violent towards their partners perceive their relationships with their children, and second, to assess the efficacy of a 12-week parenting group that the men were attending. The powerful stories from these men describe a journey of despair and healing, discovery and hope for these fathers and their children. There is little written concerning men who have been abusive and their relationship with their children. What can be found offers little hope. These stories, on the other hand, offer a great deal of hope for families who are caught in this abusive cycle.

In this final chapter, I will discuss the relevant research and integrate these findings with the current literature. I will also review the topics and themes derived from the stories in relation to implications for treatment.

Integration of the Findings with the Current Literature

My literature search for information on fathers and domestic violence proved almost futile. This appears to be similar to the experience of Sternberg (1997) as she states in her research: "A review of the literature on children's victimization and observation of violence in the family reveals a conspicuous lack of information from and about the role played by fathers in these families" (p. 265). Sternberg also questions the methodology used in most research pertaining to child witnesses. "Unfortunately, most researchers concerned with the effects of family violence have obtained information from only one person about both the history of family violence and the children's behaviour problems" (Sternberg, Lamb, Dawud, & Woursi, 1998, p. 122). This lack of information

was a statement to me about the importance we place on the role these fathers have in the lives of their children. What little literature is available does not paint a positive picture of a father's participation in his children's lives. This chapter will review the literature and its findings on men's participation in group, visitation, the role the father plays, custody, and the change process.

Men's Resistance

The vast majority of the clients attending the parenting groups tend to resist the program on one level or another. These men, often fathers or stepfathers of the children who witnessed violence, are usually court mandated to complete the program or are referred by the criminal courts or county child protection services. Men's resistance seems to stem from having been pressured to be in the group, their minimization of the impact of their violence on others, or complete denial that their behaviour is a problem. (Mathews, 1995, p. 111)

The stories and the group participation of the men in the study revealed a very different picture. All three men voluntarily attended the programs offered by the YWCA Sheriff King Centre. Two of the men were currently enrolled in Phase Three of treatment of the Men's Program and one was attending Phase One. One of the fathers had been on the waiting list for about 2 months before the group started. Each man identified "wanting to learn new parenting skills" and "to become a better father to my children" as a reason for attending the group. Even though group attendance was not mandatory, they attended 11 out of 12 sessions, and informed the facilitator when they were absent. Each of the three men voluntarily asked whether he could schedule a make-up session for the one that he missed. The three men actively participated in group discussion and gave feedback to other individuals. Jordan and Jeff frequently volunteered to participate in

role-plays while Mike preferred to watch. The fathers were able to demonstrate that they understood the content by bringing examples of how they tried to use the skill. They were able to explain the response from their children, and they questioned when it didn't work according to what they had learned in class.

Mathews (1995) reports that the men in his parenting group had difficulty taking responsibility for the abuse their children witnessed or experienced. My observations were, again, different from these. Each man took responsibility for his behaviours during the first session of group and at times it appeared to be difficult for them to listen to the new information. They made comments such as, "If I had only known this stuff before," "I never knew there was another way," "I hope it's not too late," and "I feel so ashamed." As a facilitator, I talked to the men about the importance of taking responsibility for their actions, but also commended them for trying to change. I tried to encourage them to focus on the present, and look towards the future.

The Role of the Father

"There is little known about the role of the father in homes where these men have been abusive, and what is available can often be located in articles about custody and visitation" (Peled, personal communication, Annual Conference for Child Witnesses of Woman Abuse, October, 1998). Although it has been my experience that some child welfare workers attempt to involve the father in family matters, it has largely been my experience that the father's role is not only absent from the literature, but is also excluded from Child Welfare assessments and is not taken into consideration within the legal system. My experience is corroborated by the research of Jaffe (1990). Agencies make little effort to contact fathers, and often feel that the family would function better without the presence of these dads. As Sternberg (1997) points out, "They consider mothers

rather than fathers largely responsible for their children's well-being and rely on mothers as the primary source of information about the family" (p. 286). The legal system does not view the father's role in a much better light, imposing no contact orders that can often disrupt the father/child relationship. There is usually no warning that this will happen, and the child is faced with loss, often feeling somehow responsible. This is shown in Jordan's child as he asks, "Daddy, when will you come visit? When will you come, Daddy?" Sternberg (1997) states, "Children are viewed as secondary clients and their fathers as spouse abusers" (p. 286). On a more hopeful note, I have recently worked with child welfare workers who try very hard to keep fathers involved in their children's lives. One would think that children of men who batter would be glad to be rid of their dads. On the contrary, they are relieved the abuse has stopped but they often report missing the fun things they did with their fathers. The little boy mentioned above often commented on how he missed wrestling with his dad. A study by Sternberg et al. (1994) investigated the effects of domestic violence on children's perceptions of their perpetrating and non-perpetrating parents. They "explored children's perceptions of both the abusive and non-abusive parents to determine whether children generalized from abusive to non-abusive parents" (p. 782). They concluded from their research that "they discriminate between positive and negative aspects of their relationships with their perpetrators and do not appear to transfer or generalize feelings about perpetrators to non-violent parents" (p. 783). Their findings are supported by the previously mentioned child, who was able to discriminate between the positive and negative aspects of his father's behaviour.

The men in the study were also able to separate their positive and negative behaviours with their children. They felt their role as a father was important and took it very seriously. Mike talks about how he felt about his role:

To help raise my boys as responsible people. To guide them, to teach them, to understand there are lots of choices to be made to take responsibility and consequences for your choices. And hopefully have good morals and be respectful. I figure that is the biggest role of being a father and hopefully I can be part of that.

Jordan also comments on the positive side of his parenting and how his children could enjoy being with him. “Kelly was on someone else’s lap and she saw me. ‘Daddy!’ And she came up and sat on my lap, gave me a big hug. She wasn’t afraid and James, he looked ‘Dad!’, and slid all the way from where he was and sat right beside me”

Jeff also describes going on outings with his children such as hiking and camping and he remembers the fun they experience. As a society, I think we are facing a serious dilemma: on the one hand, we need to keep our children safe; on the other hand, we are depriving them of knowing their fathers. Silverson, in the paper Fathering is a Feminist Issue, addresses this dilemma in the following manner (cited in Sternberg, 1996):

Our human tendency towards dualistic thinking has too often resulted in the conception of mothers as the protectors of children and fathers as their abusers. Yet simply separating fathers from families often increases the danger for women; most murders of battered wives take place during separation. Furthermore, we know that mothers as well as fathers neglect and abuse children. Although abusive mothers are separated from their children repairing the mother/child relationship usually remains a social policy priority. Abusive fathers who are

sincere in their motivation to establish positive relationships with their children should be treated in similar fashion. (p. 295)

Silverson could be talking about the men involved in this study as they clearly demonstrated their sincerity in wanting to establish a nurturing, caring relationship with their children.

Custody and Visitation

There is much written on custody and visitation and the role played by abusive fathers. Again, the literature is quick to point out the abusive behaviour displayed by most of these men. Zorza (1995), in her paper How Abused Women Can Use The Law To Help Protect Their Children, describes the custody process:

Almost everything in each parent's life is considered relevant to determining what is in the child's best interest: his or her reputation, lifestyle, moral fitness, values, education, employment, credit record, economic ability, criminal record, health, ability to care for the child, stability of the environment and ability to foster a good relationship between the child and the other parent. . . . Although none of these factors are considered to favor one parent over the other virtually every factor favors fathers over mothers, if not actually, then in the way the courts apply them. (p. 150)

Ehrensaft (cited in McMahon & Spence, 1995) notes that in approximately two-thirds of contested custody cases before the judges in the United States, fathers will win even if mothers have been the primary caregivers prior to divorce and independent of whether or not the father pays support after separation. Again, the stories from the group members contradict these authors. Not once in the past 4 years have I encountered a father who was attending group receive custody of his children. It was more common to

see them struggle with seeing their children on a regular basis. They appeared frightened to contest the legal system and would settle for whatever was decided by the courts, unlike the following divorced father quoted in Arendell (cited in McMahon & Spence, 1995):

I am a strong advocate for fathers' rights, for men's rights. I tend to fight for my rights as a father and it cost me over twenty thousand dollars to win the custody fight. But I had to show my ex that I was still in control here and that she couldn't deny me my basic rights just because she got the divorce she wanted. By winning the custody battle, I showed her that I was still in charge. But I knew all along that I would let my son go back to live with his mother once this was over.
(p. 196)

Certainly, my conversations with mothers would attest to this example, and I have seen many children caught in between their parents in a custody battle. The men in this group felt frustrated with the legal system and their inability to see their children, but were quite cautious about putting their children in the middle of the fight. They just wanted to see their children! Jordan says, "Well, I want to be able to visit my kids. . . ." Mike says, "I do worry about the amount of time I have with the boys. . . ." Mike's children also expressed an interest in living with him. He responded to this enquiry with "Well, I say there is a lot of things to think about if that should happen. What about your mother's feelings and how would you feel?" This does not sound like the words of a man who wants to get back at his partner by taking the children.

Mathews (1995) noted the men in his parenting programs were frustrated about access to their children and the difficulty that they had establishing positive relationships with the children after separation. The men in this study expressed concern over and over

again. They were not only frustrated about not seeing their children, but also about not being able to practice their new skills. This frustration is echoed in many of the stories heard in the group. One man recently stated, “I know now what I’m not supposed to do but I am struggling with what I am supposed to do.” In the paper Fathers, The Missing Parents in Research on Family Violence, Sternberg (1997) states:

Just as there is no uniform picture of batterers (Gottman et al., 1995) or victims, there is no formulaic solution for deciding custody and visitation questions in families where violence has occurred. Instead, legal decisions about custody and child placement should be placed on the individual merits of each case, taking into consideration the quality of the children’s relationship with each of their parents. After evaluating the quality of children’s relationships with each of their parents, all options need to be considered. (p. 296)

She goes on to state that, in some cases, supervised visits may be in the best interest of the child.

The Change Process

“Once an abuser, always an abuser.” Those words were spoken in a university Class I attended 4 years ago. Unfortunately, that is still the prevalent thought throughout society. “How can you work with these men? Don’t you ever get frustrated when they don’t change?” These are phrases I have become familiar with over the last 4 years. Treatment programs for men have only been available for a decade. Until they began, it was thought to be pointless to work with these men. All efforts were focussed on helping the woman and trying to convince her to leave her abusive husband. If she agreed to this, it became apparent that the abusive man merely moved on to his next victim. It was recognized by some professionals that by working with men, you are actually helping

women and children. This now seems to be accepted to a certain degree, although there are many people who believe that no matter how much treatment a man receives, he is still not to be trusted. Men who abuse are commonly given the labels of “batterer” and “perpetrator.” Child welfare agencies and the legal system are reluctant to give access to fathers who have been abusive, even after they have entered group treatment. These beliefs, from both individuals and systems, become obstacles for the abusive man who wishes to change his behaviour and develop healthy relationships.

How effective is it when a man attends a parenting group? According to a worker at the Duluth visitation center, “I think the groups for parents has helped a lot. You can tell the difference when the guy has gone to the groups. It’s a lot easier to approach him about something you see that’s inappropriate” (McMahon & Spence, 1995, p. 190). All three men identified “understanding empathy” as crucial in their ability to change. Empathy is referred to as the lining of the toolbox: it needs to be there in every interaction a parent has with his or her child. Facilitators at the Duluth center also think that understanding empathy is vital to the change process. “The vast majority of these fathers/perpetrators have a genuine concern for their children” (Mathews, 1995, p. 117). He also adds, “Usually fathers in the group experience difficulty when taking on their children’s view of life and attempting to see the family through their children’s eyes” (p. 117). Some men may experience trouble understanding their children’s perceptions initially, but the men in this study referred often to how important empathy has been. Jeff discusses his use of empathy: “That comes with setting aside my feelings and trying to look at the children’s perspective” Jordan states, “It’s been a little better since learning about empathy, but I still find it hard.”

Mathews (1995), in his paper Parenting Groups for Men Who Batter, also identified the topics of shame, and age and stage development as being important to change. Certainly, the men in this study benefited from understanding what was appropriate behaviour at different ages. They then realized that a great deal of the time they had unrealistic expectations for their children. These fathers could relate to feelings of shame when their children didn't live up to these expectations. Mathews (1995) reports,

Fathers may feel shame as a result of their behavior and its impact on children. They often feel responsible for any behavioral problems their children have. In fact, many of these parents seem unable to distinguish acting out behavior from normal, developmentally appropriate behavior and as a consequence, label all problem behaviors as a result of the violence. (p. 113)

This, in turn, leads them to feel more shame about their abusive behaviour.

Measuring the change that occurs during these groups has always been a difficult task. The most reliable source seems to be the men themselves and the stories they shared in group as they tried the new techniques. Mike shared that he was trying to encourage his children to think about consequences of actions and other people's feelings, in addition to holding family meetings. He felt that he was achieving some success when his son said, "I noticed you were different."

Although Jordan was frustrated by the lack of visits with his children, he was able to share how he was changing, even if it was through telephone calls.

The men often commented on how difficult the change process is: "I can dwell on it, my life, and have a pity party and then it will weigh heavy on me but if I say, 'No, I'm changing,' I can change." Change is hard and many of these men are trying to change

their whole belief system. As one father said, “I’m going to be in Phase Three forever-- this is hard work.”

Limitations of the Study

The fathers in this study represent a cross-section of all men participating in the men’s parenting groups, although with such a small sample any interpretations must be made with caution. Nevertheless, there were more commonalities among their stories than there were differences. In spite of the differences in the extent of the men’s abusive behaviour towards their children, they all struggled with issues around visitation, custody, and their roles as fathers. They all identified learning new parenting skills as helpful in building a better relationship with their children. The study set out to better understand the father’s role in families where there has been domestic abuse, and to assess the efficacy of a 12-week parenting group. The men demonstrated change within the group process and were able to identify changes they saw in themselves. It is often noted that abusive men tend to minimize their abusive behaviour (Dutton, 1994, 1998). The men in the study reported stopping their abusive behaviour towards their children, but it is beyond the scope of this study to prove that these changes occurred. It is important to hear from the children and their perceptions of the changes they see in their fathers. The stability of long-term changes also remains to be seen. The fathers themselves spoke often of the struggle of trying to remember the skills taught and slipping into old patterns. Even though they do appear determined to change these patterns, this could not be evaluated without long-term follow-up. It is also important to hear from the children and their perceptions of the changes they see in their fathers, and this was beyond the scope of this study. Due to the lack of research in this area, it is difficult to compare the results to other studies. On a more encouraging note, the topic of fathers was more visible at the 4th

International Conference of Children Who Witness Woman Abuse, and it appears that more studies in this area will be conducted.

Implications for Treatment

The results of this study provide an optimistic view of the ability of fathers who have been abusive to their children to make behavioural changes and to recognize the importance of their roles as fathers. Their stories also revealed that even though their behaviour at times was abusive towards their children, they could still identify times when it was positive. Through their stories, we can also see their ability to change their abusive behaviours. As all three men had participated in treatment programs before joining the parenting group, the results of this study emphasizes the importance of these programs being available. Nevertheless, it is clearly revealed that treatment programs that deal only with relationship issues are not enough. All three men were in different stages of treatment but they did not feel confident in their abilities to be fathers. It is important, therefore, that parenting groups be available for these fathers. The inability to practice their new parenting skills was a source of frustration for these men. Visitation centres similar to that which was established in Duluth should be available. This centre was designed as a safe place through which to facilitate parental visitations (McMahon & Spence, 1995). Such centres may help these men and their families to rebuild the father/child relationship. As the children of these men were affected by different levels of abusive behaviour, it is important that the children have access to counselling in order to heal from the effects of the abuse. These fathers speak of having tools they never had before: they now know there is a different way to parent. It is essential that far more parenting groups are available for these men than are presently in existence.

Some feminist approaches criticize allocating funds for men's treatment because of the insufficient funds available for victims. The intent of this study was not to prove the efficacy of the Men's Parenting Program; however, the findings of the study support offering treatment programs for men as a preventative approach to ending violence against women and children.

Implications for Research

Throughout this study certain questions have come to mind. First and foremost, since this study is the first of its kind, there needs to be more research in this area. We need more studies that focus on the role of fathers who have been abusive to their children. Little can be said to be known at this point, and similar studies could verify or disprove the results of this study.

Secondly, long-term studies should be undertaken to assess the permanence of change. I have been fortunate to have been in contact with some of the fathers for 4 years, and the results of a long-term study could be promising if the change process that I have observed is typical. A long-term study should include a record of the perceptions of the children because they are the people who will benefit from the change process.

Parenting groups for men are a new service, and in the early stages of development. It is therefore important that research tests the different therapeutic models of group process for efficacy. Finally, the research on group process should include an investigation of the facilitator/group member relationship to determine the most therapeutically effective approach to practice.

This thesis has demonstrated the power of listening to the stories of the fathers who have participated in the study. Their stories echo the stories of many of the men in the parenting group. Through their stories I have gained a better understanding of their

life experiences and how they have made sense of them. Their words have a powerful message of hope, not only for these fathers and their children, but also for the larger society.

Their message is very clear: they love their children and want to be part of their lives.

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Appendix A
LETTER OF INFORMATION

March 4, 1998

Dear Participant:

My name is Jean Dunbar. I am a graduate student at the University of Lethbridge, conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Nola Aitken, as part of the requirement towards my Master of Education. I am writing to provide information regarding my research profile--Past Experience, Present Discoveries, Future Hope: A Journey for Fathers--so that you can make an informed decision regarding your participation.

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of men as they attend the 12-week parenting program. As part of the study, you will be asked to participate in two 1-hour interviews. I will ask you questions such as the following:

1. Describe your relationship with your children. What was it like before the group? What is it like now?
2. What connections, if any, have you noticed between the way you were parented and the way you parent now?
3. Describe, if you can, a situation where you are parenting differently now. What was most helpful in making that change possible?

I would like to audiotape the interview so that I have an accurate record of our discussion.

In addition, we would like to obtain some information about yourself from your intake file so a general profile of the clients who participated in this study can be created.

This research project is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. You will not be denied agency services if you choose not to participate in the evaluation.

All the answers to the interviews will be kept completely confidential and only accessible to the researchers in the study. Your name or other identifying features will not be associated in any way with the published materials. The raw data will be destroyed 2 years after publication of the study results.

Research
Letter of Information
Page 2

Every precaution will be taken to ensure that completing the interviews will not cause you any harm. However, if you experience some discomfort after completing the interview, you are encouraged to let me know or phone the Distress Crisis Line (phone 286-1613) or the SKH Shelter Crisis Line (phone 266-0707) any time of the day or night.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research project, you are invited to contact:

- 1) the researcher of this project, Jean Dunbar, at 294-3662
- 2) the Director of the SKFSC, Janet Wagar, at 294-3660, or
- 3) the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Nola Aitken, at 329-2429.

After each interview I will write what we call a 'narrative' or a story about it. It will be helpful to me if you will read the narrative to ensure I have written it correctly.

If you have any questions at this time, please call me at 294-3662.

Yours truly,

Jean Dunbar
Researcher

Appendix B

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

I, the undersigned, hereby give my consent to participate in a research project entitled, *PAST EXPERIENCE, PRESENT DISCOVERIES, FUTURE HOPE: A JOURNEY FOR FATHERS*.

I understand that such consent means that I will complete two interviews while I participate in the YWCA, Sheriff King Family Support Centre Men’s Parenting Program. As well, I am aware that information from my intake file will be used to develop an overall profile of the clients who participated in this study.

I understand that participation in this study may be terminated at any time by my request or at the request of the researcher. Participation in this project and/or withdrawal from this project will not adversely affect me in any way. For example, I will still be allowed to continue in my group counselling program at the SKFSC.

I understand that if participating in the interviews causes me some emotional discomfort I can receive support by contacting my group facilitator or by phoning the Distress Centre crisis line (phone 266-1615) or the SKFSC 24-hour counselling crisis line (phone 266-0707).

I understand that all raw data will be kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only by the researcher and that all data will be destroyed 2 years after publication of the study results.

I understand that the results of this research may be:

- i. used in comparison for future studies, and
- ii. be published or reported to government agencies, funding agencies, counselling agencies, or scientific groups, but my name or other identifying features will not be associated in any way with the published results.

I have been a copy of this letter of consent to keep for my own records. I understand that if I have any questions I can contact the researcher of this project, Jean Dunbar, at 294-3662; Janet Wagar, the Director of the Sheriff King Centre, at 294-3660; or Dr. Nola Aitken, the researcher’s supervisor, at 403-329-2429.

Date

Participant’s Signature

Participant’s Printed Name

Appendix C

THE MEN'S PARENTING GROUP

When developing the men's parenting program, I was very aware of issues facing these men. I felt that before change could occur, these men needed to better understand their children's worlds. The content of the program was developed over 3 years by observing areas where the group members demonstrated a lack of understanding, and with the use of the current research on abusive men. The principles of Alderian theory, especially the work of Lott and Nelson (1995) and Glenn (1990) seemed to fit well with what I was trying to teach. Videotapes from the Developing Capable People series were also used to further explain certain topics.

Topics such as empathy and perceptions were included because many men struggled with their own feelings, and certainly those of their children. Anger appeared to be the emotion most men understood but they failed to recognize feelings such as hurt, sadness, and disappointment in their children. For many group members, the role-plays also helped them to become more aware of their own feelings: "Yes, I guess I'm feeling angry when my little boy doesn't want to come with me," and "I feel more hurt than anger."

Age and stage development is another topic that many men find difficult. They seem to have little awareness of realistic expectations for children. One man expressed anger at his 4-year-old for being curious about his two white angora cats: "Why can't she just leave the cats alone? I tell her over and over again, but she never listens. I think she does it to make me angry."

Communication is a subject area where these men seem to feel inadequate. Many are not aware of how frightening they may look to small children as they tower over them pointing a finger. One man remarked as he became aware of this: "When I got down to her level and looked her in the eye, she put her arms around my neck and hugged me. Before she always tried to hide her head with her arms. She seemed so afraid of me."

The topics of discipline, punishment, and shame usually lead to discussion of childhood issues around abuse for many group members. It is usually in these sessions that change starts to occur and connections are made: "Is that why I went crazy when I left home: there was no one around to beat me, to keep me in line; and I didn't know how?" This topic is discussed in the sixth session, as by then there usually has been enough trust created within the group for the men to feel comfortable.

Play has been incorporated in the sessions for two reasons: (a) to teach the men how to play with their children, which is the best way to rebuild the bond between father and child (Guerney, 1997); and (b) to help them become aware of their own play in childhood. It is common for some men to cry or laugh during this session as many were not allowed to play as children.

The men attend the group for 2½ hours for 12 weekly sessions. The sessions are structured so that the content is presented first, and in the second half the group members participate in an experiential activity. The purpose of the experiential activity is to have members go beyond intellectual learning to become aware of their own feelings and the feelings of their children. These exercises are processed by asking participants: "What were you feeling, thinking, and deciding during the role-play?"

Many of the men participating in this program have not only been able to build better relationships with their children, but during this process have been able to resolve

some of the difficulties from their own childhood. This has enabled them to make connections within their stories, often resulting in a different ending.