SHARED PARENTING AFTER SEPARATION: A MALE PERSPECTIVE

by

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Abstract

In 2004, over 30,000 children were affected by their parent’s divorce. Based on what is deemed in “the best interest of the child”, custody arrangements have evolved over the past 30 years resulting in both parents remaining involved in the life of their child post-divorce. In an attempt to keep both parents involved following a divorce, joint custody is becoming a common custody arrangement. Joint custody can be either joint legal custody or joint physical custody. With joint physical custody or shared parenting, the daily care of and responsibility for the children is shared between the parents.

Shared parenting can and does keep families intact following a divorce or separation. It is in the child’s best interest to be raised by both parents following a divorce. The case of fathers who were actively co-parenting their children following their divorce was explored through the case study approach. The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis to reveal the experiences of the five fathers. As a father who was in a shared parenting arrangement for 14 years, my lived experiences are woven throughout the thesis through the process of auto-ethnography.

Findings support the view that shared parenting after separation can be a positive experience for children and families following a divorce or separation. Shared parenting is more effective when both parents are able to effectively communicate and co-operate with each other. It also noted that it may not be in the best interest of the child to have on-going relationships with both parents especially in cases where there is violence or abuse against a parent and/or children.
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Acquiring post-secondary education never entered my thought process until I was forced to change careers while co-parenting my child. I need to thank my friend Ruth who supported me in my final couple of years of obtaining my undergraduate degree and in my first year of graduate studies. Unfortunately our relationship ended, but I will never forget her gentle encouraging words, and her proof reading ability. I need to acknowledge Dr. Wint who attempted many times to motivate me in my research project with limited success. Fortunately, Dr. Schmidt stepped in late in the process and began to work with me. He helped gather the committee members, and he would not let me quit even though I was ready to give up.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Joint Custody

Out of tea kettles and freezer magnets
we built a little robot
that would pick up our children
from the Opposite Parent---

Always rain, always Tuesday,
the Intimate Enemy waving
from the inner darkness,
the robot chirping in its tin voice:

Wear your wool hats, darlings,
It’s dark, it’s windy, it’s freezing.
I love you more than you want to know
but I am just a machine

slowly winding down - and the children
nodded benignly, skipping over cracks.

(Nurkse, 2003, p. 40)

Very few children in Canada are aware that the Divorce Act exists. In 2004, 69,644 divorces were finalized in Canada. The courts were used to determine custody of dependent children in 28% of all divorces which involved 31,764 children (Stats Canada, 2004). Many children understand that divorce happens, but they assume that it will never happen to their families. When it does, the children’s lives are changed forever (Cochrane, 1996). One of many questions facing parents following a separation or divorce is “who will the children live with”. The most common custody arrangements in the law courts today are either sole custody or joint custody (Folberg, 1991; Stats Canada, 2004).

Only in rare cases is there a winner following a divorce or separation, and in most
situations it is the children who often suffer the most. The emotional pain associated with the separation of a family sometimes never ends. For the past 60 years, fathers have been trying to determine the role they have in the lives of their children following a divorce or separation (Bauserman, 2002). Based on what is deemed to be in “the best interest of the child”, custody arrangements have evolved over the past 30 years resulting in both parents remaining involved in the life of their child post-divorce (Folberg, 1991). It is a challenging endeavor for a couple to co-parent their children following a separation or divorce. However, co-parenting or joint physical custody following a divorce or separation can be an effective way to keep families intact. In this arrangement, fathers are given a chance to be active parents to their children as opposed to being known as “deadbeat” or “Disneyland dads”.

Sole custody is awarded to one parent (generally the mother) along with visitation rights to the non-custodial parent (usually every second weekend). The non-custodial parent may have a voice in important decisions affecting the child, but ultimate and legal responsibility rest with the custodial parent (Folberg, 1991). A common theme for men who are the non-custodial parent following a divorce or separation is that they disengage or disappear from their children’s lives (Kruk, 1993). The term “deadbeat dads” refers to dads who are not involved with their children, most of these dads do not pay child support (Warshak, 1992).

Joint custody has become a popular custody decision because the modern legal trend has been to equalize parental rights following a divorce or separation. According to Kruk (1993), joint custody occurs when both parents simultaneously have legal custody, with one
parent (generally the mother) being the primary caregiver of the children. Joint custody can refer to either joint legal custody or shared physical custody. Folberg (1991) defines joint legal custody as “providing each parent with an equal voice in the children’s education, upbringing, religious training, non-emergency medical care and general welfare” (p. 7). In this type of arrangement, the length of time that the father (in most cases) spends with his children may be the same or slightly longer than that spent by non-custodial parents in sole custody arrangements (Coulter, 1990). The term “Disneyland dad” is often associated with non-custodial dads who have their children every second weekend. It is implied that dads spend most of their weekend entertaining the children as opposed to actually parenting their kids (Warshak, 1992).

With joint physical custody or shared parenting, the children spend equal or substantial amounts of time with both parents (Bauserman, 2002). The daily care and responsibility for the children is shared between the parents. A shared parenting plan is developed by taking into account the needs of children and the needs of the parents. One example of a parenting plan is a bi-weekly living arrangement where children spend one week at their mother’s house and then one week at their father’s house (Coulter, 1990). In a shared parenting arrangement following a divorce or separation both parents are actively involved in providing the physical care of their children. Throughout this thesis shared parenting will also be referred as co-parenting and joint physical custody.

In 2006, Statistics Canada conducted a General Social Survey (GSS) regarding parenting after separation. According to the 2006 GSS, over 800,000 people living in Canada, who had dependent children with their partners, became separated or divorced between 2001 and
2006 (Robinson, 2009). Robinson adds that 70% of the parents in the study had a written, verbal, or legal arrangement for spending time with their children, and/or making major decisions for their children. Children being old enough to make their own decisions and parents being uninvolved were the major reasons for no arrangements being in place in regard to spending time or making decisions with their children. This study indicated that 14% of the parents who had an arrangement in place were involved in shared living arrangements for their children.

Stats Canada Table 101-6501-1.2 (2004), shows that custody was granted jointly to the husband and wife 14,773 out of 31,764 times. In the same year in British Columbia, custody was granted jointly to the husband and wife 1,424 out of 2,827 times (Stats Canada Table 101-6501, 2004). Both of these statistics are in regard to joint custody, but do not indicate what percentage of shared parenting arrangements were in place. Joint custody often refers to joint decision making, but with the children living in the primary residence of one custodial parent (usually the mother). In the 2006 GSS study when living arrangements were not shared, most children lived with their mother (Robinson, 2009). Robinson adds that “this finding is consistent with other Stats Canada research (Marcil-Gratton et al., 1999, and Juby et al., 2003) which indicated that children usually stay with the mother after the marital or common-law break-up” (p. 9). Stats Canada Table 101-6501, 2004) figures also show that in British Columbia the mother received custody 1218 times out of 1398 custody orders. This is compared to 16,867 cases in Canada, where the mother received custody in 14,309 orders (Stats Canada Table 101-6501-1.2, 2004).

The Department of Justice Canada completed several research studies involving
Shared Parenting After Separation

fathers in the past decade. Bourdais, Juby and Marcil-Gratton (2001) Department of Justice Canada report was from a male perspective which focused on their lack of contact with their children following their divorce. In contrast, Gill and Alderson-Gill (2005) prepared a report in regard to shared custody arrangements. The parents from the research completed by Gill and Alderson-Gill (2005) support research findings completed by Morris (1988) that parents were generally satisfied with their shared custody arrangement. Ball & George (2008) completed research involving First Nations and Métis fathers in Canada. In this study Aboriginal fathers were interviewed and the majority of the dads were just beginning the process of having contact with their children after many years of being absent.

Establishing Research Purpose

The purpose of this thesis research is to gain a perspective from fathers who are in a shared parenting relationship with their ex-spouse following their divorce or separation. The focus of the research is about shared parenting after separation, the best interest of the children, and father involvement. This thesis is not to glorify father’s involvement with their children following their divorce, but to hear the stories of fathers who remain involved in their children’s lives. Shared parenting after separation is a custody arrangement that can benefit families no longer able to function as a family unit. Shared parenting is a serious endeavor as it involves children’s lives who are already dealing with a variety of hurts and possibly emotional difficulty because of their parent’s divorce. Shared parenting keeps both parents involved with their children, which in most cases is a desire from their children.

My Standpoint

My desire to learn more about shared parenting arrangements stems from my personal
and professional experience. My marriage ended in 1994 when my son was almost five years old. I was very fortunate that a co-parenting arrangement on a bi-weekly basis was developed shortly after the marriage ended. This type of arrangement was in place until my son turned 19 years old in 2008. I feel a sense of achievement that I remained an active father to my child following my divorce. My son’s mother is a very capable parent. It would have been easy for me to disengage from her and my son, and start a new life with a new partner possibly parenting her children or starting a new family. Making the decision to remain involved as a parent to my son involved the decision to change careers which presented a financial burden. Given the complications of trying to successfully parent my son in a blended family, I did not remarry or live with another partner. I have realized my greatest passion in life is being a dad.

It is my belief that in most situations, children benefit from the active involvement of both their biological parents following a divorce or separation. Co-parenting or shared parenting can be an effective way of keeping families intact after divorce or separation. I believe there are many benefits to shared parenting post-divorce: men are more likely to remain permanently involved with their children; fathers can experience a positive impact on their own health and wellbeing; parents can maintain a more meaningful relationship with their children; and a more meaningful relationship can be experienced with the ex-spouse. However, in order for co-parenting to be effective both parents must be able to co-operate and communicate with each other, as this is the only way for both parents to ensure the best interest of the child is maintained.

Having co-parented my child for 14 years, I enter this research with an emic, or an
insider’s perspective (Sherman, & Reid, 1994). Upon reflection, having remained actively involved as a parent in my child’s life following the divorce has been a gift to me. Today, I have a healthy relationship with my son because I remain an active, involved, and caring father. I have learned how to communicate and co-operate with my son’s mother in an attempt to provide consistency in my son’s life after the divorce. Throughout the 14 years of co-parenting many community members did not know my wife and I were separated as we were often seen standing together as we cheered for our child at sporting events or activities. Throughout his childhood, both parents often sat together during Christmas concerts, went to parent/teacher interviews together, and in high school many of his teachers did not know our son lived in different homes. At the age of nineteen my son decided that he no longer wanted to live in two homes. For the past two years he has lived on and off with his mom while he establishes himself in the work force. Even though my son no longer lives with me I will always be an active parent because I stayed involved in my son’s life following my divorce.

In contrast, from my professional experience as a child protection social worker with the Ministry for Children and Families (MCFD), I believe that in order for co-parenting to be successful it needs to be done co-operatively. As a child protection social worker I have seen situations where co-parenting may not be in the best interest of the children. I have received many reports and I have attended many complaints between parents who attempt to co-parent. Often in these reports and complaints, there is little mutual respect and communication is lacking. One incident that I attended was with a family where the parents shared joint physical custody of the children. A court order instructed that a third party had
to bring the children to the other parent. When speaking with both parents, it became apparent there was little respect for each other. I believe that children are often subjected to emotional abuse when they are caught in the middle of custody and access disputes. In my opinion, parents are not co-parenting when they show disrespect for each other and when they cannot effectively communicate together. I would think that it is hard to co-parent when parents need a third a party to bring the children back and forth so access can be provided.

MCFD receives and assesses reports from parents who are co-parenting. They have concerns about their children when they are in the care of the other parent. As a child protection social worker I call these reports “custody files”. These reports can be neglect (child dirty, or no food in the home, or parent’s drinking or drug use etc.), physical harm, emotional harm, or sexual abuse. One of my basic questions when assessing the report “is there an up and coming court case?” or “have you shared your concern with your child’s other parent?” There is often court involvement with these types of calls and there is often no communication between the parents. I am not saying that the children are not in need of protection, because sometimes the reports are valid and there is a need for MCFD intervention. However, I do know that throughout my 14 years of co-parenting following my divorce when I had a concern about my son in the care of his mom I would contact her and share my concern. Throughout my shared parenting experience I was contacted several times with a concern about my son’s wellbeing while in my care. I did not always agree with it, but I dealt with it in a co-operative way to ensure that my son’s mother’s feelings were validated.
Why a Male Perspective?

My Social Work values include empowerment and equality. Barker (2003) defines empowerment as “in social work practice, the process of helping individuals, families, groups, and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and develop influence toward improving their circumstances” (p. 142). Fathers are trying to find their way when it comes to being active parents to their children. For some men it is natural and others need support and encouragement. Barker defines equality as “the principle that individuals should have equal access to services, resources, and opportunities and be treated the same by all social, educational, and welfare institutions; a fundamental social work value” (p. 146). Do fathers have equal access to services, resources, and opportunities when it comes to being involved in their children lives following their divorce or separation?

I believe the voices of men who are attempting to remain actively involved in the children’s lives following their divorce or separation need to be heard. For 14 years I quietly parented my child in a shared parenting arrangement. Resources for men are limited, but I found ways to manage. I did not just remain in my son’s life following my divorce I learned how to co-parent effectively by communicating and working co-operatively with my ex-spouse. Research in regard to a topic that affects fathers and children may inspire other fathers and/or families to attempt co-parenting following their divorce. Whitehead (2006) advises that past research has focused on the absent father following a divorce or separation with far less attention paid to fathers for whom parenting still continues.
Research Statement

Given the choices regarding custody and access following a separation or divorce, I wanted to determine what the experience of other fathers was in shared parenting. Shared parenting is a fairly new custody arrangement and it may take decades for society and service providers to better support this custody arrangement. My research question was to identify if shared parenting after separation is "in the best interest of a child". The literature review covered the following key points: divorce; best interest of the child; shared parenting after separation; and father involvement. This research project is qualitative in nature and a case study of five fathers was conducted. The five men were interviewed and the data was analyzed through the process of content analysis. My shared parenting experience is not part of the analysis, but it is shared in the chapter before the analysis. The final chapters of this research include a discussion, my reflection, future research, suggestions, and conclusion. It is hoped that this project will generate understanding of the underlying issues and experiences of fathers who are co-parenting their children after divorce or separation.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Most Canadians consider divorce to be a right. Adults are free to marry whom they
wish, and if one of the partners finds the relationship unsatisfactory, unhealthy, or
unsafe, he or she is free to end the relationship through divorce. The 1985 changes to
the Divorce Act removed most of the blame from divorce proceedings, and since then
Canada has had, in effect, no-fault divorce (Department of Justice Canada, 2005, p. 4).

When marriages or long term relationships end, the individuals separating experience many
types of emotions. Sadness, depression, anxiety, anger, happiness, relief, guilt, and shame
are some of the emotions experienced. Experiencing these emotions can be difficult, but
when there are dependent children in the household, the separation becomes even more
complicated. Two of the most difficult questions are “How will this affect the
child/children?” and “Where are the child/children going to live?” (British Columbia
Ministry of Attorney General, 2005).

Child Custody Revolution

Over the past couple of centuries, custody approaches and court decisions have
changed dramatically in regard to custody and access of children following a divorce or
separation. According to Warshak (1992) and Luepnitz (1982) in the days of ancient
Rome, a mother’s rights were nonexistent. Fathers had total control over their children as
they were regarded as their father’s property. The lack of a mother’s rights in regard to
child custody continued till the nineteenth century, when courts gradually began to place
limits on the father’s near-absolute right to custody (Folberg, 1991; Warshak, 1992).

As the nineteenth century progressed, young children came to be regarded as having
special needs, and it was determined that mothers were better suited to meet those needs.
Nursing babies were considered to have special needs; and this sentiment prevailed in
custody cases and came to be known as the "tender-years presumption". Mothers were given temporary custody of infant children through the tenders-years presumption. The children were returned to the custody of fathers when they reached the age of four or five. As the nineteenth century came to an end, the tender-years presumption was the rationale for awarding custody of children of all ages to mothers on a permanent basis (Warshak, 1992; Wolchik & Karoly, 1988).

In the early twentieth century, the legal pendulum swung away from fathers. By the 1920s, the preference for mothers to parent children after divorce was firmly established (Folberg, 1991; Krieken, 2005; Warshak, 1992). During the twentieth century a guideline known as the "best interest of the child" standard replaced the tender-years presumption. This standard focused attention on the child's needs rather than the attributes of the parents. The "best interest test" became a general approach for judges when making custody decisions (Folberg, 1991).

From the early 1900s until the mid-1970s, maternal sole custody was generally awarded. The exception was if the mother was deemed unfit due to addiction or mental health issues (Folberg, 1991). In the 1980s, North America's divorce rate reached an all-time high, creating a one in three chance that a marriage would end in divorce (Bornstein, Bornstein, & Walters, 1988; Morris, 1988). Additionally, children under the age of 18 were involved in nearly 60 percent of these marriages ending. Folberg (1991), suggests that research at this time identified the important role that fathers play in their children's development, coupled with the benefits to children who have both parents involved with and available for the child. As a result of the high divorce rate and growing concern about the
effects of divorce on children, joint custody began to be considered. In the mid-1970s, joint custody became an option for child custody in an attempt to keep both parents actively involved in their children’s lives after the separation (Folberg, 1991).

Three Types of Divorce

The three types of divorce are: the amicable divorce; the disengaged divorce; and the high-conflict divorce. The amicable divorce is the easiest for children. Parents talk to each other freely about their children with little hostility. In this situation children have the opportunity to be close to both parents without any feelings of regret (McDonough & Bartha, 1999). Parents attend their child’s activities together and without conflict. This type of divorce appears to be a positive situation for a co-parenting relationship.

Disengaged divorce parents manage their hostility by avoiding each other. This type of divorce does allow children a good connection to both parents. The downfall in this type of divorce is that either the children or a third party are involved in communicating for the separated parents (McDonough & Bartha, 1999). In a disengaged divorce, children are involved with both their parents without being in contact with serious conflict. However, it is difficult to co-parent effectively when parents are not communicating with each other.

In a high-conflict divorce, parents are still fighting three or more years after separation. Parents cannot let go of the pain as these relationships involve deep mistrust, poor communication, mutual denigration, and sometimes abuse. Parents in a conflicted divorce take polarized positions, and both parents believe that it is the other parent who is at fault (McDonough & Bartha, 1999). Unfortunately, the children of these parents live...
in their own war zone. The result is damaging for children as they develop emotional, behavioral, and social problems. Children can become aggressive, can develop oppositional behavior and conduct disorders, and have difficulties in school (Wallerstein, & Kelly, 1980). Mcdonough and Bartha (1999) provide an example of a teenager who is a survivor of a high-conflict divorce:

I feel torn between my parents all day long. If I agree with one, I offend the other. If I'm mad at my mother, I don't talk about it, cause my dad gets off on it. I don't even tell them about my school plays anymore because I can't deal with the fight about who comes, who sits where, and with whom. Many times I have felt suicidal, and desperately alone. I really can't talk to either one. Anything I say becomes grist for their mill. I don't exist for them. And you know something funny? Although they accuse each other of being terrible parents, I think, outside of their fighting, they are both fine. Because of the fighting, I am destroyed by both (p. 5).

It is obvious that children suffer when they are being co-parented by parents who are in a high conflict divorce. Co-parenting is not effective when parents fail to collaborate or communicate appropriately.

Divorce and the Effects on Children

Parental divorce is earth shattering for children. Hodges (1991) states that “young children typically have operated on the assumption that they could depend on the predictable availability of both parents. When that assumption proves incorrect, a child may question many other assumptions about the world” (p. 8). The child may begin to question the availability of any parents which may lead to insecure or avoidant attachment (Hodges, 1991). Hannibal (2002) adds that “children lose something fundamental to their development when a divorce occurs: the family structure. Even if you keep things consistent (which is really important), and even if you keep your child’s contact with both parents a priority (also critical), the world the child has known is gone”
It is also documented that children of divorce often have lower self-esteem, poor educational performance, feelings of unhappiness, rejection, and loneliness (Durkin & Mesie 1994; Krieken, 2005). The effects of Divorce vary for children and families depending on a variety of circumstances such as age, gender, and developmental level of the child. The effects on children and families appear to be worse in those families in which there is absence of one of the children’s parents or parental conflict continues after the demise of the relationship (Lowery, 1985; Lucpnitz, 1982).

In the late 1970s a study of children of divorce by Judith Wallerstein and Joan Kelly was completed with over sixty families. Research stated that pre-school children regressed in their toilet training and speech. School age children were often depressed or angry about the breakup. Teenagers often acted out sexually or participated in dangerous behaviors such as drinking or using drugs. This study did follow ups at 18 months where half the children were still experiencing problems, and at five years where 37% of the children were moderately depressed (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980). This study identified several factors that are beneficial to children of divorce. The two most important factors were identified as easy access to the non-custodial parents and a conflict free post-divorce relationship between their parents (Lucpnitz, 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

The Best Interest of the Child

The phrase “the best interest of the child” is prominent in literature pertaining to custody and access following a divorce. Davies (2000) suggests the best interest of the child is a subjective term, and asserts that determining the best interest of the child
usually depends on the philosophical framework or perspective of the person who is making a decision regarding that child. Emery, Otto, and Donohue (2005) suggest that parents should determine their children’s best interest after separation. Goldstein, Solnit, Goldstein, and Freud (1996) state that “by failing to agree on a disposition, separating parents waive their claim to parental autonomy and thereby their right to be the exclusive representatives of their child’s interests” (p. 141). Children are vulnerable to their environment and to people in their environment. Judges have the complex task of deciding the correct placement of children when both parents wish custody (Hall, Pulver, & Cooley 1996). Emery et al, (2005) suggest that the courts interpreted children’s best interests to be primarily their best psychological interests. Hall et al, (1996) list the current codes and statutes on the best interest of children standard as of 1993:

Consider child’s wishes concerning placement; Evaluate interaction and interrelationship of the child with the parents, siblings, and other significant persons; Determine whether a history of child abuse exists; Place child in environment that best promotes full development of physical, mental and spiritual faculties; Consider parents’ wishes concerning placement; Evaluate child’s adjustment to school, home, and community; Evaluate parent fitness to care for the child; Determine mental and physical health of family members; Assess ability of parent to share with the other parent love, affection, and contact with the child; Place child with biological parent or, in the event of the death of the parents, the grandparents; Provide for stability of a stable and satisfactory environment (p. 176).

Parents receiving custody are presumed to have demonstrated emotional commitment to the child, and are willing to allow access to the non-custodial parent (Hall et al, 1996).

A three hour Parenting after Separation Program is offered to parents who are separating. This program is facilitated by the province of British Columbia, and attendance is mandatory for parents who are applying for custody through the courts.
The handbook issued by the Ministry of Attorney General of British Columbia (2007) states that “in most cases, it is in the best interest of the child to have a close, stable and ongoing relationship with both parents whenever possible” (p. 25). It is not in the best interest of the child to have a relationship with both parents where there is violence or abuse against a parent and/or children (Ministry of Attorney General of British Columbia 2005 and 2007). The handbook suggests when both parents maintain a close relationship with their child, the child benefits are as follows:

- Improves the child’s emotional well-being and recovery from the separation;
- Aids in the child’s healthy emotional development;
- Helps a child feeling divided loyalties;
- Lessens any guilt they may feel (why doesn’t the other parent want to see me?);
- Helps maintain parental authority for the child;
- Promotes parental willingness to provide financial support for the child;
- Gives the child an opportunity to develop an extended family identity;
- Demonstrates that parents can put aside personal differences enough to unite around parenting (p. 25).

Family Therapists, Psychologists, Social Workers, and Researchers are also involved with children following a separation or divorce. The consensus from the literature in regard to custody and access is that it is not in the best interest of children to be exposed to family violence or physical abuse (Banach, 1998; Kruk, 2005; Lowery, 1985).

Karpf and Shatz (2000) add that co-parenting is a lifelong bond that is beneficial to children as they proceed through many developmental stages and life-cycle events. However, Karpf and Shatz (2000) also indicate that children’s basic rights during the divorce process are as follows:

- Each child has the right to understand that the decision to divorce is a parental decision and not his or her choice and/or fault;
- Each child has the right to be free from acting as a messenger, spy, scapegoat or mediator and free from interrogation about the other parent’s private life;
- Each child has the right to maintain independent relationships with each parent and to respect the individual differences
in parenting styles and personal differences in each home; Each child has the right to be free from witnessing parental conflict and from the burden of having to side with one parent or develop exclusive loyalty towards a parent; Each child has the right to have regular access and consistent time spent with each parent; Each child has the right to not hear disparaging comments made by one parent about the other parent; Each child has the right to maintain loving relationships with maternal and paternal extended family member (p. 11).

Other researchers and therapists believe that the best interest of the child is for unbroken continuity and only one permanent custodial parent. Their argument is that children of divorce need stability, consistency, and continuity of care, especially when the child’s family system is changing because their parent’s marriage is ending (National Association of Women and the Law, 1998). In the 1970s and 1980s the research of Goldstein, Freud and Solnit’s *Beyond the Best Interest of the Child* (1973) set the standard for child custody decisions. The key variable for Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit was the importance of stability which was threatened when children experienced a change in their environment (Hall, et al, 1996). Goldstein et al, (1973) state “such change was believed to cause inevitable internal difficulties” (p. 32). Judges have a difficult decision to make when considering children’s stability and well-being.

The National Association of Women and the Law (1998) believes that the best interest of the child principle is not a useful tool, and it is easy to manipulate. The National Association of Women and the Law (1998) state the following:

determining the primary caregiver of the child should be included in a list of factors or in the definition of the best interest of the child. Courts should determine who was the primary caregiver of the child when the parents’ relationship was intact, and this determination should be included as a key factor in the “best interests of the child” test. Carol Smart, a British sociologist of law, recommends decision-makers must distinguish between “caring about” children and “caring for” children; men tend to “care about” children, while women tend to “care for” children. If women are caring
for children, they are providing the primary care and that should be considered in the "best interest of the child" test (p. 5).

This interpretation is that sole custody, and the mother being the custodial parent is in the best interest of the child. The argument of best interest of the child will continue into the future. However, children having both parents actively involved in their lives who are willing to co-parent collaboratively must be a legitimate consideration in the best interest of a child following a separation or divorce.

**Definition of Joint Physical Custody**

Wolf (2008) states that "shared parenting refers to joint physical custody, where both parents share approximately equal parenting time and are equally recognized by the law as legal guardians of their children" (p. 1). Some families chose arrangements such as a bi-weekly, or two weeks at one home and two weeks at another, or switching every other month (Ricci, 1980). According to Folberg (1991), joint physical custody refers to the sharing of residential care of the child or, in other words, regularly switching with whom the child resides. Folberg adds that this type of joint custody is allowing each parent to interact with the child in everyday situations rather than "visiting" them. Coulter (1990) indicates that in shared parenting, the daily care and responsibility for the child is shared between the parents.

**Shared Parenting/Co-parenting**

With shared parenting, it is assumed that the child spends an equal amount of time with each parent, but this is not always the case (Coulter, 1990). Parenting plans are created depending on the needs of the parents or the child. A common parenting plan is where the children spend the weekends with one parent, and the week days with the other
parent. This schedule is usually set up for families where the one parent’s work schedule
does not meet the needs of the children. Another parenting plan is day by day where one
parent looks after the children during the day, the other at night, and the weekends are
alternated (Coulter, 1990).

If parents cannot live together, how can they co-parent together following a
separation or a divorce? Emotions are running high when parents are separating from a
relationship. The feelings of love and trust are transformed into anger and resentment.
Parents who are separating often struggle as they do not know how to interact with each
other. During the grieving process parents often deal with their pain by avoiding
communication or by exploding with angry arguments when they do speak (British
Columbia Ministry of Attorney General, 2005).

Parents often need outside help such as counseling, mediation, or a support group to
be able to effectively communicate with their ex-partner with regard to their children.
A number of researchers including Favaro (2009), Stahl (2000), and Thayer and
Zimmerman (2001), found that to co-parent effectively, parents need to put their issues
aside and put their children’s needs first. Blackstone-Ford and Jupe (2004) state that:

If you don’t have children, you don’t have to interact with your ex after your
relationships ends. However, if you do have children, it’s time to put your own issues
aside and look at the bigger picture. In order to successfully co-parent after divorce or
separation, you will interact with your ex on a weekly, perhaps even daily, basis.
Know this going in and make the necessary adjustments. Don’t torture your children
by putting them in the position of watching you and your ex continue to argue even
after the divorce is final (p. 7).

To be able to get to the place where an effective shared parenting arrangement can
occur children and parents need to be safe. If physical violence is or was a part of the
relationship, shared parenting should not be considered (Bauserman, 2002; British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General, 2007; Garrity & Baris, 1994;). Physical violence is a criminal act and is not appropriate and should not be a part of any relationship (Domestic Violence is a Crime, 2004). If safety is not an issue, parents need to separate their former role as partner to their new role as a parent. The Ministry of Attorney General (2007) suggests that as a partner there was an intimate relationship which included:

1. many unwritten and unspoken expectations;
2. informal meetings;
3. a lot of emotional and personal involvement;
4. and open disclosure and sharing of information.

Whereas the role, as a parent after a separation or divorce, needs to be treated like a businesslike relationship which includes:

1. no expectations unless agreed upon or written down;
2. formal courtesies, structured interactions and meetings with specific agendas;
3. little personal involvement;
4. and limited disclosure of information unless relevant.

(p. 19)

To be effective in a shared parenting role, parents need to be able to communicate about the children without becoming stuck in past emotions or feelings. Communication in a business like relationship is confined to child-related issues (Ministry of Attorney General 2007).

It is a gift for children of divorce when their parents can move beyond their personal pain and put the needs of their children first. In most situations children need both of their parents in their lives. Shared parenting is an effective way to keep families intact. Ricci (1980), is an advocate for co-operative shared parenting after separation or divorce, and
provides a definition that paints the ultimate picture of shared parenting:

Shared parenting is a structured business like working relationship. These parents may disagree, but they resolve the concerns either by agreeing to disagree or by compromise. They keep their child away from their problems with one another. Parents can attend school conferences jointly and events together. Teachers, coaches, and child guidance counselors feel free to call either parent without risk of getting caught in parental competitiveness or territorial disputes. Children can share their lives with both parents. Co-operative parenting goes even further. It builds on that working relationship with an additional spirit of respect, forgiveness about the past, and an easier give-and-take relationship. Co-operative parents truly try to help each other. The well-being of their child takes the highest priority in their lives (p. 118).

Mom’s house: Dad’s house

In shared parenting arrangements there is mom’s house and dad’s house. Children have toys, clothes, beds, pets, and toilet articles at both of their houses. The children have a bedroom at both of their homes (Coulter, 1990; Ricci, 1980). Often, the child goes back and forth between houses with only their school bags and the clothes they are wearing. In some situations the children may bring a favorite clothing article such as a pair of jeans or pair of pajamas that they like to wear all of the time (Ricci, 1980). Coats, boots, snow pants, sporting equipment and other large accessories often go back and forth between mom’s house and dad’s house (Coulter, 1990). In rare cases, the children remain in the family home and the parents move back and forth (Ricci, 1980).

The child has two homes, but do they live by two sets of rules? The ideal is for co-parents to work together so that the child’s rules are consistent at both residences. This is very difficult because parents have different ideals and values in regard to parenting. What is important at dad’s house may not be important at mom’s house and vice-versa. Coulter (1990) provides an example:

We tend to allow the smutty ten year-old humor here; in fact, I often provide the
second verse if he doesn’t know it! That’s not tolerated at his other home. On the other hand, we stress table manners and they don’t. We always notice the difference in him on the changeover days. It’s always “Don’t talk with your mouth full”, and “Elbows off the table”. By the end of the week, he’s fine and then the whole cycle starts again (p. 121-122).

A valuable tool in parenting is having consequences and discipline for their children’s inappropriate behavior (Ricci, 1980). Consistency and follow through is a necessity when disciplining children. This task is difficult when parents are parenting together under the roof of one house. Therefore, when parents are co-parenting from separate homes communication and co-operation is imperative as they attempt to raise children with values and morals (Luepnitz, 1982). The ideal is for parents to get together to discuss the situation, not to blame each other, decide on a course of action, and then follow through with it from both their residences (Thayer, & Zimmerman, 2001).

Children now have two homes, but they will only attend one school. The distance between mom’s house and dad’s house needs to be considered when co-parenting (Farrell). For some parents, they want to live as far away as possible from the other parent, and the thought of your ex-partner driving by your residence everyday can create uneasiness. Children having friends at dad’s house for his week and friends at mom’s house for her week can get complicated especially as the children become teenagers. The closer the two houses are together the better for the children (Mandelstein, 2006). It is beneficial for children when they have the same set of friends at both of their houses. They do not lose close connection with their friends when they are residing at the other house. It is also convenient when children can walk or ride their bikes to have a visit with the parent they are not living with that week (Mandelstein, 2006). This consideration is
not imperative, but it is a least intrusive measure for children.

To go from full time parenting to a shared parenting arrangement is an adjustment for many parents. Before the divorce or separation, many parents connect with their children every day and tuck them in bed every night. With cooperative parenting, a plan can be established where parents can have daily contact with their children even if their children are not in their care that week. Attending children’s sporting events, speaking with the children on the telephone or caring for the children when the parent responsible for the children is unavailable are some ways to connect with children when they are residing with other parent (Mandelstein, 2006; Levy, 1993).

Another adjustment occurs when one of the co-parents gets re-married or is involved with another partner. Blackstone-Ford and Jupe (2004) state that “many people find that just when they finally begin to settle into a routine of co-parenting, that’s when the other shoe drops – in the form of a new partner” (p. 71). Your children now have more than two parents. Depending on the child’s age and development they may call the new parent mom or dad. The thought of someone else parenting your child is unsettling for most parents but in the divorce world it is a fact of life (Johnson & Campbell, 1988; Wittmann, 2001). A parent may feel they are in competition with the new partner. It takes a lot of work for parents to accept that their child now has another loving adult in their child’s life. It is best for children when the parents can develop a working relationship with your child’s step-parent (Blackstone-Ford & Jupe, 2004; Thayer & Zimmerman, 2001).

**Joint Custody with an Uncooperative Ex**

Shared parenting after separation appears to be a positive outcome for divorcing
families. However, for it to be effective, parents need to cooperate with each other. Many couples file for divorce because they cannot get along or they cannot agree on anything (Turkat, 2002). Parents in a disengaged or high-conflict divorce are more than likely co-parenting because of a court order. It is unfortunate when parents engage in behaviors that are incompatible for effective shared parenting because the children are caught in the middle. It is difficult for children when co-parents are communicating by the form of a letter (disengaged divorce) or parents cannot communicate with each other without engaging in a verbal argument (high conflict divorce) (Turkat, 2002).

There is intervention available for conflicted co-parents who recognize the damage that they are doing to their children. Some of services recommended, depending on availability in each community, include the following: educational programs, individual counseling, couples counseling, court appointed parenting coordinator, and mediation (Garber 2004). Libraries and book stores have literature and information that pertains to co-parenting or dealing with an un-cooperative ex-spouse. Some suggestions are: focusing on your children’s needs; taking some time and working on your own issues; understanding your feelings; working through your resentments towards your ex-spouse; and beginning to becoming a healthier person (Kline & Pew, 1992). Another important suggestion is to take responsibility for your feelings. Taking responsibility is understanding that no one can make you feel a certain way (Ross & Corcoran, 1996). Some parents never get past their conflict with their ex-spouse. When you see divorced parents acting awkwardly (avoiding the other parent) at their child’s graduation or wedding, this is an indication that these parents are stuck in their conflict.
In the Apartments of the Divorced Men

The apartments of the divorced men are small, you can stand in the doorway and see their whole lives as through a convex lens, the way a fish sees all the ocean. Or they are large, one room opening into another until it seems the whole white winter sky has settled on the walls. The apartments are not what you'd expect, they are neat as pins, and to enter them is to endure that brief, accidental pain. They are proud of everything, the divorced men, proud of the clean white microwave, the CD player with its growing audience of disks, the futon that bears the furrow of their sleep upon its back. They will show you the photographs of their children when they were young, stepping from the doors of miniature cars, pajama bottoms on backwards, or give you a full tour of the kitchen cabinets, each of which holds an item or two of use. And when it is time for you to leave, they will follow you to the top of the stairs, the door, and stand there while you drive away, their faces behind the wood, the glass—looking like the faces that you've seen in all the papers: the proud, pained soldiers torn from their homes and sent out into the world for a reason you must read on and on to understand.

Sue Ellen Thompson

Fathers

The above poem is reality for many divorced fathers. Often, the custody arrangement
Following a divorce is maternal sole custody. The traditional access for fathers is every other weekend and a couple of weeks during the summer months (Folberg, 1991). The grieving process is different for men compared to women. According to Baum (2003) men mourn the loss of their children, their home, their family life, and their routine more than their ex-partner. Men are problem solvers. Divorce is just another problem to solve, and problems have workable solutions. Unfortunately, the solutions that men fall back on are repression, suppression, and denial (Levang, 1998). According to Lehr and MacMillan (2001) some of the feelings men experience are loss, grief, sadness, loneliness, inadequacy, and incompetence. It is also noted that men tended to avoid professional contact or clinical support when dealing with their loss or grief. Men will often use alcohol, drugs, or sex to suppress their feelings.

A prevalent theme for non-custodial fathers is to disengage and become the absent father. Some fathers chose this route because they are not interested in continuing their relationship with their child (Whitehead, 2006). According to Kruk, (1993) the process of disengagement begins soon after separation, but the process intensifies within the first year. Lehr and MacMillan (2001) suggest that non-custodial fathers struggle with feeling competent in the primary caretaker role and slowly disengage from the family. Popenoe, (1996) states that “men are only weakly attached to the father role” (p.184). Whereas, Braver and Griffin (2000) contradict Popenoe by stating it is the situation that drives fathers into the undesirable disengagement behavior. Fathers struggle with their loss of parental authority, and they identify their new role (visiting their children) as meaningless. Kruk (1993) suggests that the disengaged father’s access is discouraged or denied by the custodial parent.
The father also struggles with practical difficulties such as distance, finances, or work schedule. As the father’s contact with his child or children diminishes the disengagement process begins. Glennon (1995) provides an example of one father’s journey to being a disengaged father:

It was so hard. When my wife and I broke up, it was like the earth opened up and destroyed everything. My children were very young and my ex-wife was very bitter. She wanted revenge, she wanted money, and she wanted to hurt me. The only way she knew how to get me was to keep me from my kids. She wouldn’t let me see them; when I stopped by the day care to see the kids, she called the police and said I was trying to kidnap them. It got so horrible that I finally decided to leave town in the hope that things would quiet down. When I called a few months later to try to work out some kind of visitation schedule, she accused me of abandoning them. I know I’m far from perfect and I screwed up enough myself, but she made it so hard I finally gave up (p. 15).

Fathers who are disengaged from their children often suffer from long term depression, alcoholism, and they are high risk for suicide or violent death (Kruk, 1993; Thisdelle, 1999).

Thisdelle (1999) defines fatherlessness as children living apart from their biological fathers. In the mid-1990s, it was reported that fatherlessness was 40% in the United States of America (USA). By the turn of the 21st century it is expected that 50% of children from divorce or separated families in the USA will not have a permanent relationship with their father (Bravor & Griffin, 2000; Thisdelle, 1999). Thisdelle provides the following statistics regarding fatherlessness in the USA:

- 80% of rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes.
- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children come from fatherless homes.
- 85% of all children that exhibit behavior disorders come from fatherless homes.
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.
- 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes.
- 85% of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in a fatherless home (p. 19).
These statistics suggest that the above social issues are related to fatherlessness. Thisdelle (1999) concludes that “We need to ask ourselves “What exactly are we treating, the symptoms or the causes of their dysfunction or maladjustment?” I submit the severity of the situation suggests that we treat the causes of what ails our children and society” (p. 59). According to Thisdelle, the USA has recognized that fatherlessness is a social problem and Federal funding was made available for Fatherhood Initiative Programs.

The Father Involvement Initiative (FII) – Ontario Network put on a two day presentation in April 2006 that I was able to attend. The focus was encouraging father involvement while in partnership with the child’s mother. Allen and Daly (2002), who are involved with FII, suggest that infants of highly involved fathers are more competent at 6 months of age and score higher on infant development scales. Allen and Daly also suggest that father involvement is positively correlated with children experiencing overall life satisfaction, less depression, and less emotional distress. FII encourages a co-parenting relationship suggesting that co-parenting has indirect implications for child development outcomes and builds healthy and strong families. Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) suggest that co-parenting begins when the child is born and continues into the child’s adulthood.

**Time**

“Time is our most precious resource. It is a crucial element in forging and strengthening family relationships, particularly with children. Most of us live in the hope that we can grow old and grey with those around us whom we love” (Smyth, 2005, p. 8). Through various men’s movements many non-custodial fathers have vocalized their dissatisfaction in regard to their custody order and the amount of time they spend with
their children. The majority of divorced fathers experience a loss of time with their children following a divorce of separation. Hallman, Dienhart, and Beaton (2007) completed a study with men who wanted to remain in their children’s lives. The following three categories emerged from the study: fathers experience of securing and protecting their rights to time with their children, and therefore, their rights to parental influence; view of time as a commodity; and how participants cope and adapt to a shift in time experience following a divorce. Time for the fathers in the Hallman et al. study was “opportunities for parental time, = opportunities to have an influence in their children’s lives = opportunities to act out the role of a parent” (p. 18). Many dads want to be an active parent following a divorce or separation.

Bourdais, Juby, and Marcil-Gratton (2001) completed a Canadian study that assessed the father/child post-separation relationship from a male perspective. The men who shared custody of their children were satisfied with the arrangement as opposed to dissatisfaction from men who had very little contact. This study found that fathers who fulfill their financial obligations to care-giving had an increased amount of contact with their children. Bourdais et al. add that father/child contact reduces the risk of poverty that many children of separated parents experience.

Aboriginal fathers have their own unique struggle when it comes to being an active parent. Colonization, assimilation, and residential schools have had a major impact on the previous generations of Aboriginal fathers (Ball & George, 2007). Aboriginal people have been subjected to having their culture and identity removed which had damaging effects on Aboriginal communities. Alcoholism, drug addiction, racism, and poverty are a few of
the struggles that face Aboriginal people and their communities. Many Aboriginal fathers today were not raised by their biological parents, and instead were raised in Provincial run foster homes or group homes (Ball & George, 2007).

Ball and George from the University of Victoria did a research study (2004-2007) with 80 First Nations and Métis fathers in Canada. One of the findings was that many of the fathers struggled to accept the father role or even acknowledge the birth of their child. These fathers had little contact with their first born children till he/she were teenagers or older. Fortunately, most fathers were actively involved with children who were born later. One of the fathers stated that “when I became a father it took me a long time to learn those things: how to show love, how to play with my kids, how to be a father. I finally feel I’m getting there, and it gives me so much hope” (Ball & George, 2007, p. 5).

Ball’s and George’s (2007) closing remarks from their study are as follows:

Aboriginal men in Canada remain very much on the margins of mainstream society with no focused social advocacy or previous research. There are monumental challenges facing Aboriginal fathers and families. However, several fathers who took part in the current study referred to themselves as ‘success stories’ and were proud of the quality of relationships with their children that they had achieved with little help from community programs, child welfare services, or society as a whole” (p. 19).

In an Aboriginal parenting after separation tool kit guide which was created for frontline Aboriginal community and justice workers the information is similar to the parenting after separation program put on British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General. The focus is on the best interest of the child and co-operative co-parenting (The Law Courts Education Society of BC, 2009).

What services and parenting support are available for men? The Father Involvement Research Alliance identifies the value and the struggle of connecting with men. The John
Howard Society Outreach Worker in Prince George stated that exercise and food were good tools to get men together. When he planned floor hockey and/or pizza nights it was always a good turnout (M. Ferguson, personal communication, March 24, 2005). Support services are limited for men. Lehr and MacMillan (2001) suggest that there are countless choices of support or programs for women, but the choices are limited or non-existent for men. Thisdelle (1999) points out the inequalities in social services in British Columbia as there was no funding available for at risk fathers in regard to parenting compared to a significant amount for mothers at risk. Outreach programs for fathers can be a benefit for fathers and men. Lehr and MacMillan (2001) advise that the men in their study benefited through an Outreach Program by sharing with other men, helping others deal with their problems, receiving emotional support, and parenting support. I was involved in Fathers Outreach Program through the John Howard Society in Prince George as a volunteer in February/March of 2005. Sadly, the program was terminated because the funding did not get issued for April 1, 2005 (M. Ferguson, personal communication, March 31, 2005).
Chapter 3
Research Methodology

The purpose of research is to generate knowledge. This study, Shared Parenting After Separation: A Male Perspective, is qualitative and descriptive in nature, and will gather information through semi-structured interviews using a case study methodology. The phenomenon or case that I studied involved examining fathers who are actively co-parenting their children in a shared parenting arrangement following their divorce or separation. Content analysis was used to analyze the data received in this study. As a father who co-parented his son for 14 years, I believe it is fitting to include my own experiences, thoughts, and perceptions which will serve as an auto-ethnographical approach to my work. My experience will not be a part of the analysis, but it will complement this research.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research can be defined “simply as research that produces descriptive data based upon spoken or written words and observable behaviors” (Sherman & Reid, 1994, p. 1). Qualitative research is holistic as it is case oriented and relatively non-comparative as it seeks to understand its object as opposed to understand how it differs from others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Stake, 1995). Merriam, (1998) suggests that qualitative research seeks 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” (p. 6). According to Dezin and Lincoln, (2000); Rubin and Babbie (2005), qualitative research is empirical as it is field oriented, and its emphasis is on observables, including the observations by informants. It is also interpretive as researchers rely more on intuition, and they are attuned to the fact that research is a
researcher-subject interaction.

Qualitative researchers employ interpretative practices to illuminate the world they see. Data collection is often done in the field which means the researchers study things in their natural settings (Watras, 2009). This means that qualitative researchers are attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Holliday, 2002). Qualitative researchers "are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed", (Merriam, 1998, p. 6), and seek to understand behavior from the subjects own frames of reference (Watras, 2009). In the analysis the researcher is able to communicate this meaning to others who are interested in that setting (Merriam, 1998).

Case Study

Bergen (2000) states that "the term 'case study' referred to the collection of detailed, relatively unstructured information from a range of sources about a particular individual, group or institution, usually including the accounts of subjects themselves" (p. 4). Whereas, Mckee (2004) implies that "case studies are powerful tools for understanding human experience and learning from it" (p. 6). Mckee goes on to say that there are no hard and fast rules with case studies. She compares case studies to people, they are recognizable because they share commonalities, yet remain unique. When doing a case study, the researcher needs to understand the perspectives of those being studied.

According to Stake (1994), case studies have become one of the most common ways to do qualitative inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln, (1994) state that "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically
or culturally, and by mixed methods, but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on
the case” (p. 134). Case study research is used to gain knowledge of contextual phenomena
about an individual, group, organization, institution, social, or political event (Luck,
Jackson, & Usher, 2005).

The investigator’s focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context
(Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2005). The three variations or types of case study are as follows:
exploratory case studies, descriptive case studies, or explanatory case studies (Yin, 1989).
This study will be a descriptive case study. Merriam (1988) states that “descriptive means
that the end product of a case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under
study” (p. 11). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) add that a descriptive study collects data for
the purpose of describing a specific group with no intention of going beyond that group.

According to Price (2008) a case can be comprised of “several individuals who have
something in common and who might as a result of this share an account that is more
powerful because of the diverse data collected” (p. 39). This qualitative case study research
will be comprised of a group of fathers who are co-parenting their children following their
divorce or separation. Co-parenting after separation is a phenomenon that needs to be
shared with the rest of the world. A male perspective in regard to this issue will give an
account from fathers who are parenting in this type of custody arrangement.

**Auto-Ethnography**

Auto-ethnography is rooted in the qualitative tradition of field research methodology
(Philaretou & Allen, 2006). According to Bennett (2007), auto-ethnography is about the
self/writer as part of a group or culture, and is usually written to an audience not part of
the group. Porter, (2004) suggests that the researcher’s own experience is a topic of investigation in its own right. Fathers co-parenting their children following their divorce or separation is a culture or group. Auto-ethnography occurs when the author draws on personal experiences, connecting the personal to the cultural which places the author within a social context (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Holt, 2003). Denzin (2003) believes in the transparency of auto-ethnography, meaning that the author’s own experiences and personal information can and should be explicitly incorporated into the written material. According to Smith (2005) “by using auto-ethnography, researchers can use their experiences, together with those of other participants, to complement their research” (p. 4).

As a father who co-parented his son following his divorce for over 14 years I have a personal connection and passion to the topic of co-parenting after separation. I believe my personal experience in regard to co-parenting after separation will complement this research. My original thought for my research project was the use of self (auto-ethnography) as the only data source for this thesis. However, Holt (2003) suggests that auto-ethnographies have been criticized for being too self-indulgent and narcissistic. Therefore, I decided to complete a case study on fathers who co-parent their children following their divorce or separation, but using my experience (auto-ethnography) to complement the research. I will share my experience in the chapter previous to revealing the research findings of the Case Study.

Humphreys (2005) suggests that the auto-ethnography enables the researcher to look inward, studying himself or herself to create reflective dialogue within the research. According to Pellatt “reflexivity involves the researcher in intimately interacting with texts to make some sense of the meaning, and there has to be awareness of the ways in which self
affects both research processes and outcomes” (p. 30). In the final chapter I will reflect on how I affected the process and outcome of the research, the effect the research had on me, and where I am now. It is my hope that my story along with findings from the five fathers will result in work that is rich, inviting and educational.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis

All qualitative studies involve content analysis procedures in one form or another. In general, content analysis involves creating categories of data and developing rules for coding data into these categories. The use of content analysis varies according to the type of qualitative study that is conducted (Nieswiadomy, 2002, p. 159-160).

After participants were interviewed and the data transcribed, I used content analysis to analyze the material. Content analysis can be used to examine information from qualitative interviews. It can combine both qualitative and quantitative aspects through examining the frequency of words or the occurrence of themes (Giesbrecht, 2003). Sherman and Reid (1994) define content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic classification and description of the manifest content of communication in written (records, transcripts, etc) or oral (taped) form” (p. 494). Generally, there are four units of analysis; a word, a theme, a major character, or a sentence or a paragraph (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2005). The analysis for this thesis identified words which created themes.

Content analysis can be either manifest or latent. Manifest content is the visible, surface meaning of the text (Giesbrecht, 2003; Holsti, 1969). Holsti explains that the requirements of objective and systematic methods restrict the analyst to merely reporting the characteristics of the document. Holsti questions, the point in the research process at which
the analyst may extend his analysis to the latent meaning of the text. Latent content is the deeper layers of meaning embedded in the document or the underlying meaning of the text or the message (Giesbrecht, 2003; Holsti, 1969). In the analysis, the manifest content was used to code the data. The latent content meaning of the data will be also be identified in this chapter.

Need for Rigor

When doing research, there is a need to produce valid and reliable results. Merriam (1998) believes that research needs to “ring true” to the people who are using the knowledge; in other words to feel confident that “the study is valid and reliable (p. 164). Rolf (2004) suggests that “the rigor of qualitative inquiry should be beyond question, beyond challenge, and provide pragmatic scientific evidence that must be integrated into our developing knowledge base” (p. 305). The taped interviews were transcribed by a student from the University of Northern British Columbia, and the transcriber signed an oath of confidentiality. The tapes and the hard copy from the transcriber will be kept in a locked cabinet for one year after the completion of this thesis.

Baxter and Eyles (1996) suggest that an important dimension of rigor concerns the extent to which a piece of research is believable and hence worthy of attention. Baxter and Eyles advise that “qualitative researchers are encouraged to allow the research situation to guide research procedures in order that they may gain access to human experiences” (p. 506). The statements of the research participants were copied directly from the transcribed interviews. Some of the sentences were cleaned up in order to provide a clearer and understandable response, but the meanings of the statements were not altered. In the analysis chapter some
of the quotes are long, but I believed that it was important that the father’s responses not be altered in any way. All field notes and coding systems will be kept in a locked cabinet for the same amount of time as the tapes.

Sample Selection

I used a non-probability sampling technique which is common within qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). My sample selection of participants was created through Snowball sampling. I began the process of Snowball sampling when I shared my research project with friends and co-workers. I had two referrals from friends and co-workers as soon as I received approval from the UNBC Ethics Board (Appendix A). A father who was actively in a shared parenting role (access to his children 50 percent of the time) following his divorce or separation was invited as a participant. I had two stipulations when recruiting fathers. The first stipulation was that the father needed to be co-parenting for the past two years. This was put in place because when parents first separate there is often lots of confusion and possibly hostility. The other stipulation was that I was not aware of this father through my place of employment with MCFD. To the best of my knowledge I had no previous involvement with any of the participants through my place of employment.

After interviewing the first participant I was hoping that this participant would provide me with another referral. To my amazement I did not get one referral from the first four fathers that I interviewed. None of the participants knew of other fathers who were co-parenting their children following their divorce or separation. Most participants had male friends who were divorced or separated but none of them who were co-parenting. Many of these male friends had weekend access only with their children because of out of town work
commitments. My attempt to use Snowball sampling did not work and I had rely on referrals from friends and co-workers to recruit all of my research participants. Fortunately, I knew a friend who ran a daycare and he knew two fathers who were willing to participate in my research. All of the participants lived in Prince George BC at the time of the interview. Four of participants were not known to me before I began this project, and the fifth was known to me through an agency in the community.

**Ethical Considerations**

This research project was conducted following approval from the UNBC Ethics Review Committee, as well as receipt of the signed informed consent of each individual in the study. Research participants received the Information Sheet (Appendix B) that explained the nature and scope of the research before the interviews took place. The demographic and research questions were on the information sheet so all the participants had chance to go over the questions before the interviews took place. Participants were asked to sign the Consent Form (Appendix C) that stated their agreement to participate in the research. An informal discussion with each participant took place to ensure a high level of comfort was felt before the interview took place. Four of the participants were made aware of my insider's perspective before the interview and the fifth participant was advised when the interview ended. The only reason that the fifth participant was informed after the interview was that I forgot to inform him before the interview took place.

**Data Collection**

Participants in this study were asked to answer eight demographic questions and 11 research questions. Their answers to these questions were taped and then transcribed. The
demographic questions asked of the participants were:

1. How long have you been separated?
2. How long have you co-parented?
3. What is the living arrangement? (bi-weekly etc.)
4. How many children? (the ages and sexes of the children)
5. Is this arrangement through the courts or was this a personal arrangement?
6. Have you remarried or are you living with a new partner?
7. How old were you when you were married and when you separated?
8. What was your relationship like with your father?

The questions asked of the participants were:

1. What was shared parenting like before the separation?
2. What is shared parenting like after separation?
3. How have your children been affected by your separation?
4. What is effective shared parenting and what is ineffective shared parenting?
5. What changes or adjustments have you made to make shared parenting effective?
6. What is in the best interest of the child when parents separate?
7. Tell me what is not in the best interest of the child when parents are co-parenting?
8. What strategies do you and your children’s mother use to make shared parenting in the best interest of the child?
9. As a father, tell me what it has been like being an active parent in your children’s lives following your divorce or separation?
10. What supports have you used to be an effective co-parent and/or what supports are missing for fathers as they embark on the journey of co-parenting after separation?
11. What is your favorite memory of being an active father following your divorce?
These demographic and research questions were created and selected as it was hoped they would elicit rich dialogue and content from the participants. The eight demographic questions were asked to gather and provide information in regard to each participant. I believe that it is important to get an understanding of the participants before they answer the research questions. The 11 questions from this research, were attempting to identify the following circumstances: separation/co-parenting, best interest of the child, and a father's experience.
I got married in 1987, I was 30-years-old, and my marriage ended on May 1, 1994. I was 37-years-old at the time of the separation. We had a son who was almost 5-years-old when the marriage ended. A shared parenting plan was developed within a couple of months. Over the 14 years that I co-parented I had several long term relationships, but I never remarried or lived with another partner. For the first few years the arrangement was 4 days on – 4 days off because I was a shift worker and my son would come to my care on my four days off. After I left my place of employment to return to school we changed the shared parenting plan to a week-on week-off. We had to change the day our son returned to the other parent from a Sunday to a Friday because of my work schedule in the final years of our co-parenting arrangement. Fortunately, we were able to come up with this plan without going to court. However, I remember there being one condition, if one parent left the city, he or she gives up their co-parenting rights. This must have been a verbal agreement because I did not find it documented in the separation agreement when I re-read the agreement in 2010.

My parents were blue collar workers. They both worked shift work and my dad was very much an active parent. He cooked and cleaned on a regular basis especially when my mom was at work. During summer vacations, my parents often took separate vacations to ensure that a caregiver was available during summer holidays. My dad took us on vacations to visit relatives in Vancouver or Edmonton every summer and the rest of the time was spent with either parent at our lake cottage on Fraser Lake, BC. A memory that I have in regard to my dad is that he often played street hockey or football with all the kids in the local neighborhood. For most of my childhood I was the responsible child amongst my siblings, and I often was caring for my sister who was 10 years younger than me while my parents
worked. I believe my dad’s example of being a father guided me to become an involved father when my child was born.

What was shared parenting like before the separation? I was a shift worker and I often worked nights and weekends. My wife at the time worked full time, and I cared for our child when she worked if I was home on days off or not working during the day. I was an active dad during the marriage and I also knew how to cook, clean, do laundry, and yard work. When my son was young, a lot of the co-parenting was under the watchful eye of my wife. I remember one time after my wife returned to work, I brought our one year old son down to her place of employment to meet her for lunch. I had several different colors of socks in my coat pocket just in case the socks he had on did not match his shirt. For my wife it was important that our son look his best when he was out in public, but at the time color coordinating outfits was not one of my strengths.

The one thing I would have done differently while parenting together began when my son was born. He was born premature and he spent the first month of his life at Children’s Hospital in Vancouver, BC. I immediately left for Vancouver to be with my son as my wife was still in the hospital recovering from an emergency C-section. After a couple of days my wife arrived in Vancouver, and shortly thereafter I returned to Prince George to work. I am sure that I felt that it was my role to be the bread winner and return to work to ensure that our financial situation was stable. I also probably thought that it was the mother’s role to remain with the child. If I had to do it over again I would have remained in Vancouver in an attempt to bond with my child who lived his first month of his life in an incubator.

Eventually, my son returned to Prince George Regional Hospital when he was a month old and he spent the next five weeks in the hospital till he weighed 5 pounds. I was working the
midnight shift, and I attempted to make a connection with my new born son. I did the feeding in the mornings when I got off work and I spent time with my child before I went to work at midnight. I do not believe that paternity leave was very popular in 1989. However, today I would consider it if there was opportunity because I think it is important for both parents to bond and parent their children during the child’s first year of life.

What is shared parenting like after separation? I was grateful for the opportunity. When my marriage ended I thought that I was going to pay child support and get weekend access. Even though I was an active father pre-divorce, in 1994 the only custody arrangement I knew about was sole-custody normally awarded to the mother. Fortunately, my ex-wife is a feminist and did not want to be a single parent. She had a career and wanted to continue with her career. Therefore, after a couple of months of getting every second weekend access, a shared parenting plan was established (4 days on – 4 days off).

In my opinion the first years of shared parenting were a power struggle. We needed to work out our past issues and establish ourselves as single parents. I struggled with being told what I could do and what I could not do when my son was in my care. Fortunately, we were able to work through many of the difficulties and we became effective co-parents. Over the years we dealt with many issues in regard to our son. His teen-age years were challenging, but we were able to work together and do our best at keeping our child safe. We supported each other as we dealt with his defiant behaviors. I am sure that we talked every other day. At times it felt that we were best friends, but it was parents pulling together to get through the rough times of raising a child. Today we are still co-parenting even though our son will be 22-years-old in May of 2011. His mother and I are providing financial and emotional support to our child as he has returned to the College of New Caledonia to participate in one of the trades programs. When he was a baby we started an educational fund and even though
we separated we equally contributed to the fund till he turned 19-years-old.

One of the many memories I have of effective co-parenting was in May 1999 when my son was involved in a serious car accident. He was on his way fishing with his uncle and the truck he was riding in was T-boned on the passenger side. Our son had internal injuries and he needed emergency surgery. He was hospitalized for the better part of the week. Both parents came together to get through the initial crisis and then quickly came up with a plan to ensure a parent was at the hospital 24-hours-a-day. I got the night shift 8:00 pm till 8:00 am. I remember sitting there during the middle of the night being grateful that I was given the opportunity to be an active father. This is a note from a journal entry as I sat beside my child as he slept during one of his several nights in the hospital.

Figure 1  May 28, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May 28/99</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have spent all week at the hospital with Sam. I have enjoyed caring for Sam. He is so grateful for everything. I like looking after him. This reminds me when Sam was a baby I enjoyed washing him, moving him, hugging him and being there for him. Helping him see was the highlight for me that he would have that much trust in her dad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How have your children been affected by your separation? I will never forget the day that the marriage ended, and I told my then almost 5-year-old son that I was leaving the home. He immediately went limp in my arms, he got off my knee, and he went to his mom.
This is a journal entry from May 2, 1994 the day after my marriage ended.

Figure 2 May 2, 1994

May 2/94

The hardest part was telling Sam that Dad was moving out. I watched him react as I told him. He was sitting on my knee and slowly walked towards Mom and buried his head. I could tell he was hurt and if someone would of told me that he was going to do that I would of stayed in the relationship.

In my opinion because I left the residence my son has blamed me for the marriage ending. I believe that over the years he has built a strong resentment against me. In the first couple of years, changeover was often difficult when he came to my house. He was very defiant and rude. On more than one occasion he told me that he did not want to be with me. Fortunately, in most cases he often settled down in the first couple of hours. I remember one night he returned to my care, and he was so upset that he had to leave his mom’s home because he was playing with friends. He was seven years old and he was telling me how much he hated me and that I had ruined his life. This lasted for over thirty minutes, and it was really hard to
stay present and listen to it. However, what I do remember about that night is that I let him speak his mind and I acknowledged his feelings. Things seemed to get better after that day because I let him share what was bothering him instead of trying to change his behavior. Even to this day when my son is trying to identify his anger, he states that his parents’ divorce ruined his life.

I also remember that our son always wanted his mom and dad living together again. When my son was 8 or 9 years old, I was told that he advised his mom that he thought that his mom’s boyfriend and my girlfriend should get together so his parents could get back together again. Even in his twenties, when we are hanging out as a family, our son will often comment that he would like it if we got back together as a couple. From my experience children’s lives are changed forever when their parents separate.

What is effective shared parenting and what is ineffective shared parenting? Effective shared parenting is being able to communicate, being co-operative, and having the best interest of the child at the forefront of the situation. In my situation co-parenting was difficult for the first couple years, but it got easier as the years went by. In my opinion, both parents worked hard at making shared parenting effective. We used to squabble over holidays quite a bit. Who was going to have the child on Christmas morning was an issue during the first couple of years. In the past ten years squabbling over holidays has not been an issue for me. To be an effective co-parent I worked hard on communicating the most important details to his mother regarding our son when he was in my care.

Ineffective shared parenting is not being able to get past the pain from the troubles in the marriage. What really helped me was that we were able to quickly resolve the financial issues (splitting of assets). Another plus was that my ex-wife and I worked outside the home and our salaries were equal which made spousal support not an issue. After the financial
situation was dealt with the only thing to worry about is parenting our child together. Fortunately, I understood that I needed to be respectful of my son’s mother when dealing with her in person and when I was interacting with our son.

What changes or adjustments have you made to make shared parenting effective? In order to make shared parenting effective, I made many changes and adjustments over the years. I needed to learn how to communicate because my lack of communication is what ruined the relationship. There was no violence or infidelity in the home, but I would use silence as a form of communication when we were in conflict. I never dealt with anything and in the end the relationship was filled with conflict and sometimes hatred. After the marriage ended I worked on being assertive through effective communication. Working through Beverley Hare’s (1988) workbook, Be Assertive: The Positive Way to Communicate Effectively, I began my journey in being able to effectively communicate with anyone, especially my son’s mother in a co-parenting relationship. Over the years I noticed such a change in my ability to communicate my feelings and the ability to have difficult conversations with my ex-wife.

I needed to change careers in order to remain an active parent in my son’s life. Two years after my separation my employer Canadian National Railways (CNR), with whom I was employed for 15 years, was moving their office to Edmonton, Alberta. My choices were to move or to take a buyout package. Having co-parented my son for two years already, I decided to take the buyout and go back to school in an attempt to change careers so I could remain in my son’s life. My changing careers began my endeavor in obtaining my degree in Social Work and becoming a Social Worker with the Ministry of Children and Development (MCFD).

Another adjustment that I made occurred when Sam was going into high school. I
decided that it was important for Sam and me to relocate to be closer to his mother’s residence (the family home) so Sam could live in one neighborhood rather than two. The move was good for Sam, as he was able walk between his homes in five minutes, and he could hang out with the same friends during his week with dad.

Another adjustment that I had to make in my co-parenting relationship was when either parent had another partner in their lives. I never lived with another partner, but I had several long term relationships during my years of co-parenting. My son’s mother often accused me of being different when I was involved in a relationship. I was not as open or co-operative when I was involved with another partner. I believe the difficulty was in regard to my new partner at the time not being accustomed to having ex-spouses being co-operative with each other following a divorce. For myself, I had to work hard on my insecurities when I dated a woman who had a relationship with her ex-spouse. My insecurities also included dealing with my feelings when my son had a parent-child relationship with a man who was in a long term relationship with my ex-wife. It was hard to watch my son interact with this person. Fortunately, as time went by I felt secure in my relationship with my son, and came to believe that he would benefit from having another loving adult in his life. As an adult, my son continues to have a respectful relationship with this same man who he lived with for several years. In addition, I co-parented with this man as he cared for my son when my son’s mom was travelling for work. I will connect with him to go golfing when he returns to town. This type of situation is a lot of work, but I was able to adapt as I believed that this man loves my child.

What is in the best interest of the child when parents separate? If at all possible I believe that both parents should stay involved in their children’s lives following a divorce or separation. In most situations children want both of their parents to be involved in their
lives. I believe that the more involvement both parents have with their children, it is more likely they will stay involved when their relationship or marriage ends. In my situation, there is good chance I would have moved to Edmonton Alberta with my job if I was only having access to my son every second weekend. Over the years my child has voiced his displeasure about his parent’s marriage ending. However, as a young adult he has an active relationship with both of his parents. Even though he does not openly admit it, I believe that he is appreciative that he had the opportunity to develop his relationship with both his parents following their divorce. I remember on one occasion when he was in his teenage years I thanked him for visiting me. He replied that he does not visit me, he lives with me.

Tell me what is not in the best interest of the child when parents are co-parenting? From my experience as a child protection social worker, I would say that it is not in the best interest of the child when parents do not put their children first after their relationship ends. As I stated in my introduction I have witnessed many situations where parents are unable to get past their personal pain and the last thing they want to do is be co-operative with their ex-spouse. Any type of violence (physical or verbal) is not appropriate around children. Even arguments over the telephone when children are present are harmful to children. My son remembers the one argument that his mom and I had in his presence. It was early after the separation and we were arguing over money. As time progressed we knew what was appropriate around our child. To this day we still do not agree on many issues, but we do our best not to involve our child. In the fall of 2010, my son’s mom and I were not getting along and I went back to my old behaviors (not communicating). My 21-year-old son’s comment was “that after all these years you are never going to talk to her again”. He advised me that I was being childish. Fortunately, I agreed with him and I dealt with the issue.

What strategies do you and your children’s mother use to make shared parenting in the
One of the struggles that we had in our co-parenting situation was the parenting styles of the two different homes. I often heard the complaint that it took several days for our son to fit back into my ex-wife’s parenting style after he returned to her care. I listened to the concern but I was never able to come up with an answer because we parent differently and it is one of the difficulties when the children live in two different homes. A compromise we made, was that we would communicate regularly what was going on with our son. There was always a private phone call or private conversation that occurred before the child returned to the other parent. We tried to acknowledge what was going on in regard to our son’s behaviors, and when discipline was being handed out in the one home. Another strategy that we used was that we kept in close contact with each other in regard to our son’s education. We always attended parent teacher interviews together. Our switch over day was a Sunday at 7:00 pm. One of the guidelines that we had in place was that all homework was completed before the switch over time. When the child returned to the other parent there was only a couple of hours to connect with the child before the beginning of a new week. An interesting point about the two houses was that my son had rituals at his different homes. At my house we ate supper in front of the television watching the news. At his mom’s house he liked sitting at the kitchen table. As an adult he prefers the rituals that he created as a young person when spending time with his parents.

As a father, tell me what it has been like being an active parent in your children’s lives following your divorce or separation? It would have been really unfortunate if I did not have the opportunity to remain in my son’s life or to be an active parent. It was not easy, but I appreciated dealing with the day to day parenting duties. Some of the highlights for me were dealing with the education system, taking my son to the doctor, and taking him on vacation.
My son struggled in school and I was in the principal’s office many a time dealing with one thing or another. When he was younger, one of my struggles was dealing with my son in an appropriate way after getting the information from school. The first couple of times I came home angry and often raised my voice. Fortunately, I learned some strategies and took some courses in an attempt to raise my son to be responsible for his own actions without having to use physical discipline or constantly raise my voice.

When my son was eight-years-old I was struggling dealing with his behaviors and being an effective parent was difficult. I enrolled in an eight week parenting course called Systematic Training For Effective Parenting, which followed *The Parent’s Handbook* (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989). I would get frustrated with him in our morning routine as we tried to get out the door to be on time for school. One strategy I learned was making my son responsible for having all of his belongings (lunch, clothing, and books) for the activity we were attending and doing some brainstorming to correct the current situation. One of the many incidents I remember was when we were driving to school one winter morning and my son forgot his mitts. It was cold that day but not cold enough for children to remain in school during lunch and recess. I said “we need to brainstorm ideas of how we can get through the day.” I suggested that he try to borrow a pair of mitts or see if there was a pair of mitts in the lost and found that he could use. My son was quiet for a while, but as he was getting out of the car he advised I know what I will do “I will steal Bradley’s mitts” and he slammed the car door. I was glad it was Friday because there were only three more days to my Monday Night Parenting Class.

What supports have you used to be an effective co-parent and/or what supports are missing for fathers as they embark on the journey of co-parenting after separation? In the first year I believe that I just got through it. I did not expect that my son was going to be so
upset with his new situation. It took me a long time to realize that I was not the only one in pain following my separation. During the first couple of years I leaned on my parents during the summer time to provide me with emotional support. Then I had to learn some tools and skills by attending a parenting class and reading available literature to deal with the situation. In my second year of College I met a male friend who was a single parent to three children. He had no parental support as he grew up in the foster care system and at the time his ex-wife was not in his children’s life. We became good friends and often supported each other through difficult situations. Our children often hung out with each other, and at times the two families would have dinner together. I quickly realized that my situation was minimal compared to what my friend had to deal with. Another strategy I used was that I wrote in journals. I have 4 journals in my collection that I used over the years. Journaling was an escape for me and a chance for me to put my thoughts on paper.

What is your favorite memory of being an active father following your divorce? I would have to say our vacations or trips together. One of our annual trips was taking the VIA passenger train from Prince George to Jasper. Sammy was pre-teen and through my connection with the CNR I was able to get us a free trip on the train. We would leave on Saturday morning and come back on Sunday evening. The overnight in Jasper involved walking the main street looking for wildlife and going for out for dinner. On a couple of the trips, my son got to ride in the locomotive which was a highlight for him.

My son and I hiked up Mt. Robson several times. The first time he had just turned 7-years-old. We were going to hike Mt. Robson (three day trip) and then finish the trip by going to the West Edmonton Mall for the remainder of our holiday. We were leaving Prince George and it was raining and I asked my son “what should we do if it was still raining when we get to Mt. Robson”. My son’s idea was that we would set up the tent, go
inside and put on our rain gear and then hike the mountain. That is all I needed to hear, and we put on our rain gear, and completed our adventure. After four days of hiking we went to Edmonton and spent a few days of exploring the city. After my son's accident we also went to Edmonton to hang out at the mall. This is a journal entry dated August 19, 1999. All of my trips with my son were a special memory for me.

In closing, being able to be an active parent to my son following my divorce was a gift. I made lots of mistakes being a dad and being a co-parent. However, I tried to keep the best interest of my son in the fore-front of my thoughts as I went through my days. When I made mistakes, I did my best at making the appropriate changes. Shared parenting following a divorce is a difficult task. I believe that my ex-wife and I did an amazing job raising our child from two different homes. When my son graduated from grade twelve we celebrated as a family. My son’s mom and I sat side-by-side as he collected his grade twelve diploma. As a family we are looking forward to the next celebration of life for our child. Some days I question why we couldn’t have parented together as a family under one roof. Unfortunately, I will never know the answer to that question, but my reality today is that I have a respectful relationship with my ex-wife and my son following my divorce.
Wednesday, Sam and I headed for West Edmonton Mall. We arrived there at 8:45 P.M. and left at 9:30 P.M. The first move for Sam was to step into a water fountain full of water, therefore we all got wet and soaked. The first item on the agenda after that was the next two hours in the water park. It was great to be a kid again and play. The water slides were exciting. I like the blue bullet and twisty the best. The dark tunnels were frightening. The wave pool was relaxing. It was great to bounce up and down into the waves. Watching Sammy enjoy himself and be a kid into worth the time and effort and money of this trip. We would spend around the waves as if he was four years old. The excitement in him was evident, even though he was not. The waves carried him away at times. The closest we got was more than special. I got a pump on a few in the morning. But the rest of the day was very loving and caring. Got a pumpa trying to keep Sammy under control.
Chapter 5
Research Findings

For this research project, six participants agreed to be involved in an interview-style discussion. A participant needed to be actively co-parenting his child/children for at least two years following his separation or divorce. One of the participants who took part in the interview process did not fit the criteria because his daughter lived with him and she had access to her mother whenever she wanted to go. This participant was the primary parent, but identified himself as a co-parent because he had an amicable relationship with his daughter’s mother in regard to access. Therefore the data from the remaining five participants was analyzed and used in the research findings. All interviews were conducted in person, were taped, and later transcribed for the purpose of data collection and content analysis. The names of the participants have been changed for this in order to ensure confidentiality. In addition, the names of the father’s children have been changed and the children’s mother’s names were not identified.

Demographic Questions

Table 1
Demographic questions 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How long have you been separated?</th>
<th>How long have you co-parented?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>28 months</td>
<td>28 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>4 ½ years</td>
<td>4 ½ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>5 ½ years</td>
<td>5 ½ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathon</td>
<td>7 ½ years</td>
<td>7 ½ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants began co-parenting as soon as their relationship ended. This result could be aligned with question 5, “Is this arrangement through the courts or was this a personal
arrangement?” All of the co-parenting situations were established without any court intervention. However, when I was interviewing one of the participants he was going to court in the near future because of a disagreement in regard to access. According to the participant who has been co-parenting for four years there was a disagreement around access about the up-coming Christmas (2010) holiday. This issue had arisen because the mother recently got into a new relationship and she wanted their child over the Christmas season. I found out later that the judge did not have time to participate in a hearing and the mother was awarded interim custody till a hearing could be run in 4 or 5 months (fall of 2010). After the original court date, the father had to go back to court for weekend access till the hearing was held.

Table 2

Demographic question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Original arrangement</th>
<th>Current arrangement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>week on – week off</td>
<td>same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>split week</td>
<td>week on - week off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>(2 days on - 5 off - 5 days on - 2 off),</td>
<td>week on - week off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathon</td>
<td>split week</td>
<td>week on - week off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>split week</td>
<td>recently week on - week off</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It appears the original access arrangements were set up to best suit the children and the parents. Over the years access arrangements changed in accordance with various situations. Two families used a split week or the 2-5-5-2 schedule because of the children’s ages. These families moved to a week on - week off arrangement when the children became a little older. Two of the families did shared parenting from two different communities at the beginning stages of the separation until the other parent was able to re-locate to Prince George. It
appears the week on – week off living arrangement is the most straightforward and the easiest to follow. The change off or return day is always on the same day, and the children are with their other parent for everyday of the week which includes the school week or work week, extracurricular activities, and the weekends.

Table 3

Demographic questions 4, 6, and 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age married</th>
<th>Age separated</th>
<th>Children (ages and sexes)</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>son - 5 1/2 years old</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>daughter - 9 years old</td>
<td>New partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>son - 10 years old, daughter - 8 years old</td>
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<td>Jonathon</td>
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<td>Danny</td>
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All of the participants were over 30 years of age when they began co-parenting their children following their separation. All of the fathers were single for at least 18 months after their relationships ended before getting involved with another partner. One of the participants was single for over four years and another participant was single for over 10 years before recently getting involved in a new committed relationship. A couple of the fathers began co-parenting their children as young as 2-years-old. It was interesting to listen to the experiences of dads who are parenting daughters as opposed to sons. The challenges are the same, but at the same time they are different.

In response to demographic question number 8, What was your relationship with your father like? Rob begins with,
He was pretty traditional in his role, so he worked, mom stayed at home. So he’s more traditional and mom was the more active parent. He worked shift work, so he could be working days or nights. So when he was home, often he’d be sleeping in the daytime and we tried to be quiet. He had a bit of a temper so you’d have to be really careful and quiet. He wasn’t very warm. He wasn’t affectionate whatsoever. I was probably 17 or 18 when I got any sense that I did something that actually made him go, “Wow”. I was probably maybe 35 when he first hugged me and said, “I love you”. So but on the other side of it he was athletic. I can remember having elastic band or super ball fights. We had lots of laughing and I would have liked to have done more activities with him. He was very athletic when he was younger and I was as well. I would have liked to have done more of that with him. So I would say overall kind of mixed. Even though I didn’t hear him say things I could tell that he might be proud of me, but he didn’t say it. He wasn’t my role model. Unfortunately he would be an anti-role model. Like in terms of how he treated me at certain points I remember thinking to myself, “I would never do that because that’s something I would never want to do to my son”. So he was a role model along the line of precautionary details or something. But in other ways my son and I have elastic band fights and throw super balls at each other now.

Paul adds the following:

It was quite quiet, my dad would work a lot, didn’t see him much. I spent more time with him during the weekends than during the week. When I was busy with sports he was busy with work. Then we moved to Smithers when I was a little bit older so I didn’t see him as much because he had to commute back and forth. I’d see him only once in a while on the weekends. He was there with sports or when I needed him.

Lloyd states,

My father he actually passed away about a year ago in February and I wasn’t really super close with him. I always wanted to be a little closer. He was a fairly reserved kind of fellow but I knew he cared. My parents separated when I was in Grade 7. I lived with my dad for a bit and it was good times with him. He wasn’t around as much as I’d like him to be but like I said, I knew he cared. You know, there are some things I would like to have done differently when I reflect on that relationship as a father myself.

According to Jonathon his relationship with his fathers was “distant and cold, cool and distant.

Whereas Danny shares that,

It was good, I would say when I was younger, it was more your traditional family and my dad was a bread earner and you know, he came home, did his own thing for the most part. When we got older, we got closer. So when I was younger, he didn’t do much with
us, and you know I thought that was pretty typical with a lot of families growing up back then but when I got older, we got closer and actually we were pretty close. Like I mean we did a lot of stuff together, he lived in the same community at the time as well. We go golfing, have a few beers, shoot some pool, whatever. So I had a pretty close relationship with him.

The terms "distant and cold", "I wasn’t super close to him" and "unfortunately he would be a reverse role model" indicate there were struggles between the participants and their fathers. From all of the participants there was an indication that their father’s involvement was limited when they were children. The traditional family was discussed “my dad was a bread winner, he came home, did his own thing for the most part”. During the interviews it appeared that all of the dads were attempting to be involved with their children before the separation. However, there was no indication that any of the dads took paternity leave during the first year of their child’s life. It appears that the mothers were the primary parent after the child was born, and the dads took on the role of the bread winner. One comment from a dad in regard to his parenting role in the relationship was “that his wife sort of took over the parenting after the baby was born and he felt very much outside in that relationship” (Jonathon, personal communication, May 25, 2010). Several of the fathers commented about their struggle finding their role in regard to shared parenting before the marriage or relationship ended. An important component in shared parenting after separation is father involvement or shared parenting before the relationship ended.

The eleven questions from this research, “Parenting After Separation: A Male Perspective”, attempted to address the following areas of interest: separation/co-parenting, best interest of the child, and a father’s experience. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The data from the five interviews was read five times. Words were used as
a coding method. During the first reading I got familiar with the data. Whereas, in the second reading fifteen different words from all five interviews were recorded. During the third reading the list of words was narrowed down to seven. In the fourth reading it was noted that all five interviews had five common themes. In the last reading the following five key words/themes were identified as: time; best interest; family; communication; and conflict because they were identified as most common and most relevant.

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**Time**

The first theme that will be discussed from the data collected is the word time. When parents separate, one of the concerns for fathers is being able to spend quality time with their children. Often, father’s access will be every second weekend following their separation or divorce. Through shared parenting, both parents are able to be active parents following their
divorce. The theme time was prevalent to questions regarding separation/shared-parenting and a father’s experience following their divorce. In response to the question “What was shared parenting like before the separation”?, research participant Rob shared that,

most of the time it would be her because of feeding reasons or whatever else. But I remember one time he was crying in the middle of the night, about three or four in morning, and I woke up and I’d go to his room. We had a recliner in there and I took him out of his crib and he just laid on my chest. We pulled a blanket over us and we both fell asleep in that recliner. I remember thinking to myself, “this moment will never ever be here again.” I could be angry, I could be frustrated, I could be thinking, “He woke me up in the middle of the night,” but I would cherish this because it’s gone forever. So that’s the type of involvement that I had, but to the most part she kind of controlled the parenting. There would be times when I wasn’t comfortable with him standing up in the bathtub when he was just a toddler, that kind of thing. She didn’t understand why that would beconcert for me so “I’d go, well we can go to the edge of the cliff, but do we need to go to the edge of the cliff.” So I was probably more safety conscious. Sometimes that would create some conflict, and probably at times I probably wasn’t pulling as much weight as I should.

For Rob, time was reflecting back to when he was co-parenting before his relationship ended. Rob will also never forget one special night he had with his son while he was attempting to be an active father before his separation. In contrast, Lloyd and Jonathon discuss what it’s been like being an active parent following their divorce. Lloyd has two children and he shared,

At times it’s been great. It’s challenging too. I always like connecting with my kids. I enjoy spending time with them. I find it challenging in that you don’t have a lot of time for yourself to just unwind and just do the things that you would like to do. Parental self-care is very important because if you don’t take that time you can burn out and become resentful. So you really have to focus on being selfless. You have to be a strong manager and disciplined in how you use your time. It’s just been busier, it’s hard to not be anxious all the time you know. Because you’re feeling rushed, you’re feeling the pressure providing, and then sometimes you feel guilty when you can’t do the things that you would have liked to have done with them. You learn a lot about yourself though.

Research participant Jonathan, who has a daughter who was 2-years-old when the
marriage ended, adds the following:

So it was all new from bed at night, the first cold, to the first flu, like there was a lot of firsts. It's overwhelming, it's intimidating, it was at a time when you were already feeling alone, sad, and your whole life is in turmoil. Like it's a whole other level and I remember feeling completely overwhelmed by it all. Then time goes on and you learn. Your life becomes something different and you never go back. As I got better at it I loved the time I had with Sara. I don't want to get off topic here but I wouldn't trade it for the world now. I mean, let me rephrase that, I wouldn't have signed up for this road that I'm on but having found myself on that road, I make the best of it. I love the time I have with Sara. I think I have an opportunity to do a lot and to experience a lot of her life that I know a lot of other dads don't get. So I've seen it all, I've done it all, I've had to go through every gamma of her life. I've had an opportunity to be there. I've been friends with other dads and they don't get the chance to do any of that. They have other people to take care of a lot of those things and I've done it. I feel very close to Sara because of that. I don't have other experiences to counteract it, but I feel very in tune with my daughter.

For Lloyd, time was precious and he had to learn how to manage his time to be an effective co-parent. Being a single parent is not an easy task for anyone. Whereas for Jonathon time is twofold. First it was the period of time when he first became a single dad. Secondly, even though it was difficult, time is also the pleasure that he received because he has spent so much time with his daughter. Danny who has co-parented for over 10 years, speaks about his favorite memory of being an active dad following his separation.

I think back when he was 2 or 3 years old and it was nice. He was dependent on me and that felt pretty good. Then as he gets older, a little more independent and he just wanted to do his own thing, there's just so much to it. I feel fortunate for the fact that we had the opportunity to have so much time together. I think that's what it boils down to. A big upside is it has given me so much time, you know one-on-one time together. I would have to say, it's going to be the travel. The travel is the biggest; I really did quite a bit of it I guess. I remember a time we were just doing the ferry across Arrow Lake to get over to Revelstoke. I remember sitting there for the Ferry, we were down on the beach and I'm showing him how to skip rocks. You know having quality father/son time. I mean, we had a lot of that and it's a big thing because it's just the two of us. We had the opportunity to just, do that kind of stuff. Yeah, just most of our road trips and stuff like going to Disneyland and Disney World. There is a lot of good memories. Coaching the soccer, there's just so much.
For Danny, time is connecting with his son through travel or being a coach for his son’s sports teams. When dads are involved with their children following a divorce or separation there are endless possibilities for father/children time. In response to the same question Paul adds,

I’d probably say having alone time with my daughter. Sit there and play, do what we want. Don’t have to worry about anything else. Like when I first split up with my ex-wife, her and I used to go to the park quite a bit because she lived to go play in the park. Just having alone time. One-on-one time, that’d probably be the best thing. Now being in a relationship, I don’t have as much alone time with her, but my partner is good with saying, “Go spend some time with your daughter.” I don’t, like when it was just me and her it was just one-on-one and that was tough for her when I got into a relationship because now there are other kids and she has to share dad right? It was tough for her for a while, but she’s great with it now.

Time for Paul was about change, how his time with his daughter changed after he got involved in another committed relationship. Paul has fond memories about his one-on-one time with his daughter, and those memories will never be forgotten. His time with his daughter is now shared with his new family. This theme was about fathers spending time with their children. Time was before separation, after separation or a favorite time while being an active father. There was passion, and commitment in the father’s words as they spoke about time.

Communication

Communication as a theme was evident in regard to the questions about effective coparenting and strategies used to make shared parenting in the best interest of the child. For any type relationship to be healthy, communication is vital. Many marriages often end because parents cannot effectively communicate together. When discussions are occurring about shared parenting after separation, the question often asked is how do you expect
parents to effectively communicate in shared parenting situations when they could not do it when they were married? That is the million dollar question because communication is one of the keys to make shared parenting successful. In response to the question “What strategies do you and your child’s mother use to make shared parenting in the best interest of the child?”, Jonathon begins with,

balance and communication. We find once a week to sit down for half hour and allow that conversation to be what it needs to be. In terms of planning and scheduling, so we do our best at maintaining that communication around those issues. The other strategy is that we’re both very involved in her life. So when it’s her night for piano we both show up, we both show up for the sports, and we both show up for all the school plays. So we’re both very involved in her life, both of us. So communication as a strategy has been really effective for us. Being there and being involved. The other strategy is we rely on each other to take the heat off. So in my work I travel, and Sara’s mom is right there at a drop of a hat. So she acknowledges the challenges that I have as a single parent and I do the same for her. So that’s been really effective as well.

This is a good example of shared parenting. Parents are communicating about their daughter. They actually sit down for a half hour in terms planning and scheduling. Shared parenting takes a lot of work and commitment in order for it to be effective. Whereas, Paul responds to the question “What is effective shared parenting following your divorce or separation?”

Well effective shared parenting would be if we were able to communicate I guess, which we are really not able to do anymore. I’ll give an example of my daughter when she’s bad; she’s at my house and she’s going to her moms’, “Ok, are there going to be consequences? Are you going to follow through with it during your week?” But when there’s no communication I guess it’s ineffective parenting and that’s how it is right now. Honestly I don’t think it’s going to get better any time soon because like I said I’m going to court next week. Like I tried to call her tonight because my daughter has an activity but she’s with her mom. But she comes with us because it’s our activity. I got no communication, she wouldn’t even respond to my email, text messages or nothing. I just had to show up at her house and she wasn’t there but my daughter’s grandma was there and she goes, “Yeah, you can take her.” That’s the toughest one for me is zero communication because I don’t like, I totally do not like that. Well I guess there really is
not effective parenting with us because we don’t talk.

Paul is having difficulty with the lack communication in his co-parenting arrangement because he is aware that it is not effective. According to Paul who has been co-parenting for over four years, the situation began to deteriorate a year and a half ago right around the same time he got involved in another committed relationship. In response to the same questions, Rob shares,

well we used the term amicable. So we try to be civil and friendly you know? The relationship to this date, I’d still be probing to explore where is our relationship and where it’s going. Do we have a friendship? Are we just parents? Are we trying to get back together? We’ve been really trying to figure that all out. So in context we’ve been both trying to keep his best interests in mind when we deal with things. So that would be effective trying to keep communication open and in some ways we are communicating better now than we did previously. So communication, we don’t agree on things and so we have to let it go. I just have to trust that when he’s with her that things are going to be ok, and vice versa. I’m more safety conscious in that regard. The other side of that is she gives him a little bit more freedom to explore and try so he can be more of a daredevil with her. I’m more of a “You can be a daredevil, but you have to be more of a controlled dare devil.” So try jumping off that thing that’s four feet high first before the thing that’s ten feet high. Maybe it’s not fair because she wouldn’t let him jump off something that’s ten feet high, but I guess we’ve had to both reside ourselves to knowing that we have to relinquish our control. Relinquish to help you trust and communicate. I think that would be effective.

Rob has been co-parenting for over two years. The first two years can be the most difficult because everyone is trying to find their way in an extremely emotional time in their lives. It appears that Rob is doing his best communicating with his ex-partner in an attempt to make co-parenting after separation effective even though he could still have feelings for his ex-wife. It is difficult to adjust to this new way of life and remember that the relationship is now different but parents need to communicate with one another. Trust is another strategy that Rob uses along with communication in attempt to make shared parenting effective. In response to the question, “How have the children been affected by our
separation?” Lloyd replies,

I think they’d probably say that they want their mom and dad back together again and in this case they have said that from time to time. But they also remember the arguing and that’s unfortunate. I don’t, I never wanted them to hear or see any of that but I think they would agree that it’s better when there’s not that kind of stuff going on. They don’t have to witness that and they can see that we’re not friends like we used to be. I’ve enrolled in a couple programs for grief and loss called Rainbows. Just me and the kids which is based through a church that I found was helpful in helping them to express themselves. I talk to them regularly about it too, I usually make a point to have active communication in the form of a meeting probably once a week or every two weeks. They can talk about whatever is on their mind. They’re fairly well adjusted, they’re doing really well in school, they’re communicative, they’re thoughtful, they appear happy for the most part.

There is no argument that children are affected by their parents separation. Lloyd attempts to give his children the skills to express themselves which is a valuable tool for children from any walk of life. Children from separated families definitely have feelings that they need to express. Another point is that many children will never stop wanting their parents to reunite as a couple. Lloyd communicates with his children, now he shares his strategies that he uses to make shared parenting in the best interest of the child.

There was a time when I didn’t think I could ever talk to her properly and even though I’ve taken workshops in communication and I’m sure she has too. She has a lot of professional training and that as well. Even though we can talk well with the people we work with, we have a hard time talking to each other. The part of the reason why we’re not together is I just found that we just had a hard time working together. More often than not we disagree and often times I’ll just talk to her spouse who I get along with pretty good. I find him easier to talk to you know. I found it a real challenge to talk, to communicate with her. The communication was just really ineffective and we work out things with the kids when we talk to spouses. Her partner, she’s remarried and I just talk to him a lot.

Lloyd communicates with his children’s mother through her spouse. Fortunately, Lloyd is aware that he cannot personally communicate with his ex-spouse without his emotions getting in the way. Lloyd is also aware that he needs to have communication in his
relationship with the children’s mother, but he uses a technique that is effective. In response to same question, Danny adds,

well I guess again, it boils back down to communication. As we moved forward, we kind of got his routines more in check so it’s the same thing at both places. We started to mirror each other more. Clothing is a bit of a struggle. What always ends up happening at first, it always seemed that way anyway, I buy him these clothes. He’d wear them to his moms and then I get him back and he’s got all mix matched clothes on. You think, “Well she’s always keeping the good stuff and what not.” But eventually it came down to, “Let’s put some things in place,” like especially with things you bought, you kind of like to see it back. When Tyler gets old enough it’s like, “Hey, I don’t mind seeing that back at my place.” So as it progressed, it became more of a responsibility between the two houses. How that would work for him, which actually ended up, I think it more and more ends up putting responsibility on him. It isn’t a bad thing.

Danny describes an interesting issue that occurs regularly during the process of shared parenting. Items often do not get returned on a regular basis. Important items such as special blankets, toys, clothes, and school material are often left at the opposite parents’ house. Communication was used to identify the problem and attempt to make some changes. Furthermore, Tyler learned some skills around being responsible for some of his personal belongings. The theme communication was used to let the children share what was going on for them, parents unable to communicate while parenting after separation; and communication was used in an attempt to be effective co parents in a shared parenting situation.

Conflict

The word conflict was identified often throughout the questions regarding shared parenting and what is in best of the child. Arguing, fighting, and disagreement were also considered under the umbrella of the word conflict. When there is a discussion in regarding divorce, conflict is always a concern as parents often can no longer live together because of
some kind of dysfunction in their relationship. Children witnessing domestic violence, verbal or physical, is harmful and it is against the law. Child protection social workers from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) receive calls when domestic violence has been reported to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). MCFD takes the position that children who witness domestic violence are being emotionally abused by their parents or the parents are not protecting their children from abuse. When parents are co-parenting their children after separation it is important to ensure that conflict is not witnessed by their children. Rob shares his experience in regard to the question “What is shared parenting like after separation”?

Well we don’t live together so we can deal with things as we see it in our own household. It didn’t start off that way. She was imposing her will on my household initially which created some conflict there again. I forget what the specific issue was but I asked her, “Do you ever take him out to McDonald’s for supper?” “Well yeah we go there and play and stuff.” So I said, “Well you can’t do that anymore.” She said, “What? You can’t tell me that we’re not allowed to do this.” I said “Exactly, just like you can’t go into my home and tell me I’m not allowed to do this. You can’t come and impose your will on me this way. We have to trust each other. We’re trying to help him grow old.” So I think that was a realization point. That was actually the point where she stopped demanding that I do things a certain way. So now we are able to communicate our wishes.

When parents are co-parenting co-operatively there is often lots of interaction in the two households between the parents and the children. Setting boundaries and creating co-operative parenting styles is often a struggle. According to Rob, he set boundaries so he could parent his child without total interference from the other parent. Jonathon shares what is not in the best interest of a child when parents are co-parenting.

Anything negative about the other parent, or any negative connotations, or anything that would place conflict in the child’s mind as that has to play havoc in the child’s life. The child is perceiving somebody else not thinking fondly or positively about that person. I can imagine how that feels. I think separation is not in the best interest and I really
just don’t understand people that can just leave their children. I don’t get it and I can’t imagine how in any way it’s healthy unless there’s some reason why that separation is necessary. I think parents have a choice but I don’t see how moving away could be in the best interest. The non-cohesive group, I think for a child that’s gone through a separation, I think it’s still important that the child feels like they’re part of the family, that you are a family, and that you are perceived as coming from a family with firm roots and foundations. The world may look a little different than your friends but I think the child should feel healthy, secure, calm, and that there’s a solid base and that base should be maintained. If you do not offer that to the child amongst other chaos that comes from a separated family, I don’t know what that child has to hold on to.

Jonathon believes that talking negative to the child about the other parent is not healthy.

He also believes that both parents should stay involved with their children following a separation unless safety is an issue. Danny talks about what is effective shared parenting and what is ineffective shared parenting.

Well I think effective shared parenting, number one, the biggest thing with shared parenting is because there were disagreements in the relationship between each other. I think ineffective shared parenting is when those feelings and those issues come in the way of the child. That’s where it gets ineffective you know? You’re arguing about this and you’re arguing about that. Taking a child and using them as tool to get back with the other person. I think in our relationship, at the beginning there was a lot of that. There was a lot of anger and animosity going on. But I mean we both soon realized it’s not doing Tyler any good. So I think as far as effective, that the first thing that you have to get out of the way, getting rid of all the animosity and stuff. I guess the other part is like a sharing of what’s going on in each house and all that; keeping in close contact and that’s part of it too, to get rid of the animosity. In order to, you know, making decisions for him and growing up, you have to be in agreement. That child is always going to be there, and you’re going to have to make decisions. You need both parents to make those decisions and to be effective you need to be on the same table. You need to be thinking in the best interest of the child.

Danny talks about co-parents needing to deal with their anger and animosity in order to be effective in their endeavor to be effective co-parents. Lloyd speaks about “What is in the best interest of the child when parents separate?”

I don’t think that they should be part of any of the issues that were the reason for the parents separating. That they are assured that they are in no way responsible or at fault
for the separation, and that they are reminded of that both parents love them. They don’t witness any arguing, any conflict, that should be done in private and discretely. I don’t think it’s ever healthy when one parent uses their child as a confidant. I would never dream of, you know, talking ill of their mother to them. In fact, I’ve done the opposite; I’ve put up pictures of her as much as it pains me, just kidding. No, but I put pictures up on the wall of their mom. It’s just something you need to be able to overcome in your own way, you know that ego feeling. It’s like whatever it’s for the kids and they like their mom and I’ll even tell them a few things about their mom. They need to hear that because again they are half her right? Half of her self-esteem is linked to them so if I’m talking bad about her I might as well say that half of them is bad, and I could never do that.

Lloyd strongly suggests that the children are kept out of the parents separation in all aspects. Lloyd acknowledges that there is going to be conflict, but children should not have to be exposed to it. In response to the same question, Paul adds,

well when you separate, you do quite a bit of fighting and I try to avoid that. Our daughter shouldn’t know about any of that. I don’t talk to her about any of it. If something is going on between her and her mom or me and her mom, she doesn’t need to know about it. It’s just try to make it as easy as possible life for her. Like no changes, try to keep her in routine for school, waking up, everything like that. Her activities, trying to make it doable for her because she’s only ten years old. She doesn’t need to know that her mom and I are fighting. But her mom has no problem telling her everything. That’s the killer for us because we’re not agreeing right now with a lot of stuff. She’s coming back next week and I’ll hear all about it. Like, “You’re not her friend, she’s your daughter, she doesn’t need to talk about stuff like that.” So for me, the most important thing is keeping her in routine. Try to keep her out of the loop with stuff, with what’s going on between her mother and I because she doesn’t need to know that stuff.

Paul agrees with Lloyd that children should not be involved in any way in regard to their parents’ separation or disagreements. Leaving your past feelings and emotions at the door is imperative when co-parenting, but it is also difficult to do.

Family

The theme “family” was evident throughout the data in regard to what supports the fathers used and how the child was affected by the separation. For one participant, family
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was the most prevalent word throughout his interview. It was apparent that in his co-parenting situation the three of them were a family that lived in two different houses. It was refreshing to hear his co-parenting situation as he and the children’s mother continued to be a family as they co-parented their daughter. In reference to the question “How has your child been affected by the separation?” Danny shares,

Tyler was so young when we separated, as far as he’s concerned, it’s normal. “What do you mean mom and dad live together?” For him it’s as he gets older, he realizes what a normal functioning family is. But for him, growing up, he didn’t really, it didn’t make any difference to him. I think if anything, Tyler got a little more out of it because now he’s got his mom’s parents, grandparents, his mom’s husband’s parents, my parents. I mean for him, he’s just got a whole bunch more extended family and that’s just all it means to him. You know, more people in his life is what it boils down to. It’s given him the opportunity to, you know, if he’s had enough over there he looks forward to coming to my place. It’s given him a little more flexibility in those regards. So, I don’t think it’s harmed him at all, and if anything it’s given him a different perspective and maybe given him a leg up in some regards. I think a little more independence because of it as well because most kids just get one spot and that’s what they’re accustomed to. He’s able to move a little bit more, and that’s created a more open person because of that.

In response to the same question Rob adds the following:

So there has been times when we’re in the kitchen dancing to music. Him and I would be dancing and he’d pull his mom in and tell us, “Well you guys hold hand and stuff too.” You can tell he still wants that family bond and we’re both aware of that. We know that he would like mom and dad to be ok. So I think that’s certainly having an impact on him. There are times when he wakes up and he’s crying and he misses mom. He wants to call her so we are trying to coordinate the back and forth between two households. Sometimes he wants to bring his favorite toy back and forth or sometimes he wants to have something from mom’s house but we can’t get hold of her. We can’t contact her on the phone or whatever the case so he gets upset. Because in his mind he needed that and wanted that. So I think he’s learning some life skill like schedules. He’s learning that you can’t always get what you want. But there have been some impacts, things that would be different if we were together.

Danny has co-parented his son for 12 years and his reflection in regard to the effects of divorce on his child is that his son has adjusted to the back and forth of co-parenting by
being more versatile. Whereas Rob, who has been co-parenting for a little over 2 years, shares the struggles that his son has adjusting to living in two separate homes. Often children are affected the most when parents separate. Divorce is hard for children to understand.

Three of the participants mentioned family in regard to what supports that they used. Paul shares,

I’ve pretty much had friends and family, I’ve taken a couple of parenting classes that really didn’t do much for me. They were more for people who just separated and I took it four years later. So as for supports for us, I really don’t think there’s much support out there for guys. There needs to be more because it is quite difficult especially if you have girls and don’t have a clue what you’re doing. And with zero communication like, “Ok, I need you to come help me with something with your daughter.” And when you have zero communication you have to figure this out by yourself. But the support I’ve had the most has probably been my mom. Also my sister-in-law because I needed a women in her life. But besides that, I don’t really think there’s much for men out there for support.

Lloyd adds the following:

Well you know, you depend a lot on family and thankfully I had a mother, a step father and grandparents that were supportive. They were and they are supportive. I didn’t see much of my father or talk to him about this, but I knew he could appreciate what I was dealing with. He would say that sometimes. But anyways you know what? I worked in the community and I’m a teacher and I really just believe our community is just lacking in the resources available to fathers during these times. That is the part I find really frustrating you know? There are a lot of supports for mothers out there and there should be. But then again there should be support for fathers too and for couples, you know? There really is not. I just think they should do more out there for fathers. Fathers really need it because men are generally not as expressive as women are overall. So they’re not likely to say what’s on their mind, but you can bet at least they are listening, and that they want their kids to be healthy and happy. Their very solution centered, they want to see good things happen. They don’t want to see the kids suffer, trying to deal with the job, and then not being able to see their kids. That’s like getting dragged through the meat grinder. I feel for a lot of dads you know? That’s a hard weight to bear.

According to Jonathon,
so it’s been a real impediment to not have that family support. In particular when I was in such a small, isolated community. It would have been so much easier to have family there as support like a mom, or dad, or brothers, or sisters, anybody right? It was a big deal. The other one is as a single parent, as a father, is you’re being asked to take on a role that you, for me anyways, I wasn’t really prepared for you know? Your guy friends aren’t doing it so it’s hard to go to them for advice on how to do it. So you’re kind of asked to do it all and there isn’t a huge support network there. There’s not a coffee group for dads that get together at ten o’clock to share stories because they’re all at work for eight to ten hours a day. So I don’t know if a women, I suspect there’s a bigger social network there or easier social network. But for a single dad on your own you’re kind of on your own. When I was brand new single dad I used the moms of some of my guy friends because I didn’t know how to buy a winter jacket for a child. I also had a friend fly in from Calgary. He came up for the first week which was really helpful. Somebody to help me figure out what to do. He just flew up and helped me figure it all out because the first week was just chaos. You’re trying to work and suddenly you have this two year old and you have to change her diaper and feed her.

All three fathers spoke about the struggles they had being single dads and the lack of supports available in the community for men. Paul and Lloyd were fortunate to have family as a support. Whereas Jonathon, spoke about the lack of family supports and that he relied on his friends for support. Jonathon lacked family supports, but he has strong family values.

In response to the question, “What is in the best interest of the child when parents separate?” Jonathon shares the following:

Is that family in my view if it’s a healthy family, understand I can’t comment on other people’s divorce, our divorce was not rooted in abuse, or neglect, or anything of that nature. So for us, what was in the best interest of Sara was to retain that balance. I’m not suggesting that every divorced family should retain that, there are other issues that play, but for us, the interest of Sara was to retain that family and we still do to this day. So it’s mom, it’s dad, it’s family, it’s candle night, it’s baseball night, and we still go for dinner. For us it’s about acknowledging that with Sara. She still has questions about us together you know? It came up last night and we’re open with her about that. Mom and dad do much better not living under the same roof. That’s ok in our home. We’ll talk like that. We’re still a family we just don’t live together. I think for us that is Sara acknowledges that our family is a little unique and different, it’s still a family and there’s still value in that (Jonathon, personal communication, May 25, 2010).

Jonathon and his former spouse co-parent with the value of family. Co-operative shared
parenting gives families an opportunity to remain a family. If this co-operation continues, Sara will not feel uncomfortable or awkward, as both of her parents gather, when she graduates or gets married. The theme family for the research participants is twofold. Family is support and family is of re-creation. From the five interviews it appears that co-operative co-parenting gives children from divorce an opportunity to re-create a positive version of family.

**Best Interest**

The theme best interest was evident in the questions regarding effective co-parenting, strategies to make co-parenting in the best interest of the child, and what is in the best interest of the child when parents separate. The research participants provided a variety of responses in regard to what was in the best interest of children when in a shared parenting relationship. In response to the question, "What is effective or ineffective shared parenting?", Lloyd begins with,

Well I think that when there’s, conflict between the mom and the dad supersede what’s best for the kids. So let’s say one parent is resentful of the other spouse or the other partner after separation and they’re denying say, “I’m not going to let you see the kids today,” for example. They’re withholding that right, which isn’t in the best interest of the kids because they still have that conflict and that has taken a priority over the need to have the relationship with the kids throughout. That’s where I think it would be ineffective. You have to be able to put your ego aside or your pride aside and facilitate the opportunity for your kids to be with their parents because those kids are half you and half your spouse. They need them both and they need an opportunity to be in a relationship with them both. If not, they’ll suffer and so I think it involves a lot of not being selfish and being communicative. If you can talk and there’s a breakdown in communication, wait awhile until you’re calm, or use email, or talk to the spouse’s partner if you can. If anger is going to be an issue, there’s ways to resolve that. Maybe I need to take anger management or something to that effect and do some kind of work around that. Because conflict and anger is going to work against you and that’s not going to be in the best interest of the kids.

For Lloyd it is not in the best interest of the children when they are used as a tool to get
back at the other parent. He also believes that it is in the best interest of the children to have both parents involved in their lives. Lloyd also suggests that parents need to work on their personal issues to become better co-parents. In response to the same question Jonathon states,

effective shared parenting to me, is parenting where the best interest of the child has to come first and we spend a lot time talking about what’s in the best interest of Sara. Having said that, I can’t always be about the child because a healthy mom and healthy dad are in a better position to care for a healthy child. So effective shared parenting is healthy child focus on the child but also a certain degree of compassion and caring about the other parent you know? That’s difficult to understand, and to get to that point where you can do that. I think for Sara’s mental health and physical health her mom has to be in a good place. For her mom to be in a good place when it comes to parenting, her mom and I have to be in a good place. I think that’s all related for effective parenting. I think ineffective parenting, many things can be an ineffective co-parent. I’ll list some of them. From, any negativity with that child I guess is the big one. Any perceived negativity on that other parent from one of the parents, I think, has far reaching and damaging consequences to the child. I don’t know how they would deal with that. I think that ineffective co-parenting is when both parents don’t show love and respect for each other. I mean, ineffective parenting is if one, we made a pact that if either one of us would leave town, we move together. So I think that ineffective parenting is lone parenting, so if dad moves to a different town I just don’t agree with that at all. I think both parents need to be very involved in the raising of that child.

Jonathon believes that parents need to co-operate and communicate to make co-parenting in the best interest of a child. Jonathon also adds that co-parents need to support each other to ensure that everyone in the family is healthy. In response to the question “What strategies do you and your children’s mother use to make shared parenting in the best interest of your child?” Paul shares,

I don’t even know if we have any strategies to try and make parenting in the best interest of our child. All I know is that I try to do the best I can when I have daughter for my week. I honestly don’t know what her mother does on her week because, like I said, we have zero communication. What happens at her house is her business. What happens at my house is my business. And I just try to, you know? When she comes back to my house Monday morning, I try to get her back into her routine and do the best we can. As for strategies there isn’t really any strategies. I don’t sit there when she comes like, “Oh
I miss you so much! It's just like, get back into routine, get ready for school, let's go.” So for strategy wise, I really don't think there are any strategies for that. It's pretty tough having strategies when there's zero communication because you're not working together you know?

Throughout Paul's interview he made it clear that his co-parenting situation is not in the best interest of the child. When parents are not communicating or co-operating it is difficult to work together to make a co-parenting situation in the best interest of the child. In response to the question “What is in the best interest of the child when the parents separate?” Danny shares that,

Staying together wouldn't have been in his best interest you know? The relationship and whatnot, it doesn't work if there is constant fighting. I think right off the bat, you know, you look at the child's best interest. Would it have worked better? Like it's not healthy for a child to live in an environment where two people are fighting all the time. I guess realistically, I mean with separation and stuff, it's in the best interest of the child overall. If you know it's not going to work, there's no point in holding on, to stay together and that's what a lot of people do – to stay together in the best interest of the child. Will the child get a better upbringing because of that you know? Watching two miserable people grow up together? I kind of doubt it. So what's in the best interest of the child when parents are separated and obviously you both stay open. Certainly interaction with the child, staying with them I guess when it comes to work and all the activities and stuff like that. I think making sure that both parties are involved in something like that. Like when he's at his hockey game, I should be able to go to it and so should she. I mean making sure that he feels the love on both sides and stuff like that and support from both sides.

Danny believes that parents ending their relationship when it is not working and learning how to parent together from separate households is in the best interest of the child. In response to the same question Rob adds,

trying to work it out together. Don't dig into your own positions. You can't agree on things and there's a healthy mistrust between the couple. You can't trust each other then you get lawyers involved and there's money that can be saved within your household that you can give to somebody else because you want to fight to get more of the share of money. Ultimately you all lose out. The child loses out because he could have skating lessons or something with that money. It's also an emotional impact to that. So I guess trying to be amicable with things. Trying to keep things distinct in terms of what's in
the best interest of the child. Trying to be gracious with each other and trying to support each other because you’re both in situations that aren’t ideal. So don’t take out frustrations on the other person because they have their own problem to deal with. I think in the best interest of the child you have to work together by trying to go over and above. Deal with the dispute, but you have to deal with it with your child’s interest in mind.

Rob believes that when marriages end parents should work things out themselves instead of getting the legal system involved. According to Rob, when parents have lawyers involved there is no communication between the parents and the conflict is never resolved. Then it is left for a judge to make decisions for this family. Unfortunately, in some cases this needs to happen, but the possibility of effective co-parenting occurring is highly unlikely when courts are involved. The bottom line is co-operative shared parenting can be in the best interest of the child/family that is now living in two separate households.

**Latent Content**

In the analysis of the data, the manifest content or the visible surface meaning of the text was identified. However, the latent content or the deeper layers of meaning of the data was not discussed. According to Kaminski (2008), latent content is the investigator’s impression or interpretation of the underlying meaning of the data provided. Kaminski adds that concepts emerge from the data when latent content analysis is used. This researcher will identify two underlying meanings in the data. The first underlying meaning which is not so hidden will be identified by using the stories of two fathers who have been who have been in a shared parenting relationship for over four years. This comparison is not about the fathers as they both are passionate about parenting their daughters following their divorce, but it is about their shared parenting situation.

The dad (Paul) who was more than willing to participate in this research study shared
openly in regard to his struggles in his shared parenting arrangement. This is one of Paul’s many statements in regard to ineffective shared parenting “well effective shared parenting would be if we were able to communicate I guess, which we are really not able to do anymore” (Paul, personal communication, April. 2010). Another statement from Paul is

> Well I guess there is no effective shared parenting with us because we don’t talk. The best I can do is try email and text message like, ok, your daughter has this with school. For the most part I’m pretty good at it. My ex-wife is not good at it at all, and like I said before, my daughter suffers from it.

It appears that Paul’s shared parenting experience deteriorated in the last year or so.

According to Paul there has been no two way communication since April 2009.

Besides no communication, there was no interaction between the two households when Paul’s daughter was not in his care. Paul states that

> it’s tough because I only get to see my daughter for a week. So when I do get to see her, I try to get as much information as I can from her. How was school? How was last week.? How are things? I miss like a half of her life all the time (Paul, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

Whereas, in co-operative shared parenting arrangements there is often open contact between the child and parents even when it is not your week. Paul did not talk about going to activities for his daughter when she was in the care of her mother. However, he did say it was a struggle to get his daughter to attend cadets when she was in her mother’s care which was an activity created from his household. In this situation the co-parenting relationship has broken down. In the over four years of co-parenting, it is uncertain if Paul and his ex-wife’s shared parenting relationship was ever effective. However, it appears that when the parents got into new relationships the communication between the co-parents changed. After four years of the child having access to both parents, it is a shame that a sole custody arrangement is now being applied for through the courts. Unless this family gets much
needed support, there is a good chance that shared parenting will never be effective with this family.

It was interesting to code the data from Paul’s interview because his most common words were communication, best interest, and conflict. In Paul’s case the words referred to no communication and on-going conflict in his shared parenting arrangement. Time was a word that Paul referred to in appreciation for his time spent with his daughter. The word “family” was found once in the data and it referred to his new family. Paul had no other words in the original 15 words that were selected from the second reading of the data for analysis. Paul’s data was filled with uncertainty and doubt as he shared his experience in regard to his shared parenting arrangement. It was obvious that Paul knew the difference between ineffective or effective parenting.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Jonathon’s data was filled with words such as love, friendship, healthy, supported, opportunity, overwhelmed, and the five words used in analysis. All of these words were used in a positive light in regard to his shared parenting arrangement after his separation. Jonathon’s data was filled with hope for the future, and commitment to his family that now live in separate homes. The frequent word found in Jonathon’s data was “family”. For Jonathon he considered his family to be his ex-wife and daughter. In reply to the question “What is shared parenting like after separation”? Jonathon shares,

It has been everything. It has been fantastic on many levels and it has been full of anxiety and everything in between. I think it’s run the gauntlet. I think there’s been times when it feels really good, safe, and secure. My ex-wife and I both live in the same time so we spend a lot of time co-parenting together. But with that comes, and there’s some great benefit to that, but with that comes those moments when things aren’t gelling, things aren’t fitting, and you both have opposing views. Things can erupt and that’s challenging. So it’s been a real growing experience for both of us. I wouldn’t change it. I wouldn’t want to be a single parent, but I would say co-parenting has its own set of challenges and benefits that go with it.
In response to the same question, Jonathon goes on to say:

When we first got divorced there wasn’t a lot of friendship there. Now we’ve evolved into a friendship to raise our daughter together. But the first couple of years were more difficult. Now it’s a lot easier, there’s a lot more water off our backs. You’re in it for your child and you just move past all the emotional baggage from the marriage. So you have to stay really faithful and strong to raise your daughter. But in the first couple of years you’re still so wrapped up in the emotions of the divorce and all of that. It’s so much more difficult. Everything is just so much bigger than life. So it definitely goes through an evolution. When you have friends going through it you just have to tell them, you’re going to go through a couple of rough years but it’ll cool down.

The underlying meaning between Paul’s and Jonathon’s situations is that it takes both parents to ensure that shared parenting is effective and in the best interest of the child. For some reason Paul and his ex-wife are having difficulties communicating and are not being co-operative. As a result of their behaviors shared parenting is not effective. On the other hand, Jonathon and his ex-wife have worked through their emotional pain in regard to their separation, and they have developed a co-parenting arrangement that works for their family. In Jonathon’s situation it appears that his relationship with his ex-wife is filled with trust, co-operation, and communication. These types of principles will benefit their daughter as she lives with both parents in a shared parenting situation.

The second latent message is that all of the research participants have passion for being fathers, and they are grateful that they are part of their children’s lives. In response to the question, “As a father, tell me what it has been like being an active parent in your children’s lives following your divorce or separation”, Rob begins with,

I love my son. Everybody says their son is the smartest, fastest, but mine really is (laughter). I really enjoy my time with him. We have a lot of fun together. It’s just been amazing watching the development you know. The other day he goes, “Dad come see my slap shot”. I go downstairs and I grab the stick and I stand against the wall. I stand back and he just lasers the tennis ball; it blows right by me and the kid is five. So I say it’s a lucky shot and he goes again. It blows by me again. I’m thinking to myself, “Maybe if I actually try”. So I bear down and try but I barely make the save this time. Man, he’s five and I already have to put equipment on. I’s like, “Wow,” it was just
yesterday he was lying on chest in the middle of the night. All of a sudden he’s very athletic, very coordinated, very fast and I’m looking at him going, “Ok I have to help nurture that and help him develop some skills.” Not that I’m going be Walter Gretzky necessarily but it’s been just so much fun watching him. We’re driving in the car and he is in his seat in the back and he just starts singing the ABC song all the way through. I’m thinking, “I never taught you a single part of that.” It’s just amazing, he got that from daycare. I did zero to teach him that and I just think it’s amazing. It’s been really cool to see his development and try to do things that help with his development. I don’t try to do things for him. I try to help him problem solve so he can do it himself. So just to be part of that, it would have been devastating to miss it. Had I missed it I probably wouldn’t have even known it was missing. So I call his mother and go, “Hi, you wouldn’t believe what he did today. It was the funniest thing.” And I’d tell her the story. It’s all these funny things. One day I was in the kitchen and getting him ready for waking up. So I’d open the door and he wasn’t getting up so I turned on a cartoon. I turned on Thomas The Tank Engine cartoon. I turned it on loud enough so he could hear. I was in in the kitchen and all of a sudden this streak goes racing by, and he muttered as he’s going by, “I’m awake!” And I just started laughing. It’s just that the situational comedy that he brings you know? The things kids say, the things they do. What I’m missing is probably the biggest one. I was sitting there on the couch and he comes over and gives me a hug and says, “I love you dad,” That is just, nothing can beat that.

In response to the same question, Paul adds,

For me it’s been good because I get a lot of one on one time with her; a lot of alone time. Got to know her a lot better as a person. When we were together there was a lot of yelling so she doesn’t have to see that anymore. But also it’s tougher because I’m a male, she’s a female. So, she has a lot of those, she’s a little girl and she has a lot of emotions. She does a lot of crying and that took me time to get used to. Then trying to get her ready for school and I’d have to do her hair and stuff like that. That was hard learning to do that stuff; getting her ready and dressed and all that. But, do I regret it? Not at all. I think after I separated with my ex-wife, the year or year and a half there were probably the best out of the ten that we were together because it was a lot calmer at the house and we got to know each other quite a bit better. I liked it.

Lloyd response to the same question is as follows,

I wouldn’t want it any other way. I just can’t imagine how it could be good for my kids to not be able to see their dad you know? Like once a month or twice a month, to me that’s just a recipe for a lot of grief and for a lot of problems down the road. Kids need to be around both parents and I believed that since I was a kid myself I was prepared, if necessary, to use all my energy and resources to ensure that I would have my kids in my life. I didn’t plan to be a dad to not see my kids.

In response to the question, “What is effective shared parenting and what is ineffective
shared parenting?”, Danny shares,

Ineffective is just that, there is no line of communication. Trying to one up each other. You know, we have tried to stay away from that. There are differences in households too and that makes it difficult. At my ex-wife’s place they got a farm, horses, all that kind of stuff. They don’t do much travel, whereas myself, I enjoy travel. Taking Tyler to Disneyland and Disney World. So we do a lot more of the travel stuff whereas they don’t, and I tell him that, “It’s not that your mom doesn’t want to do things for you it’s just that we do different stuff.” So I try to keep both households similar. I think that would be tough on a kid because I’m going to give him this and she’s going to give him that. I’ll admit I might be a little more lenient. He might get a little more from me. But it’s not like he bases his decision whether he stays at her place or my place on that. I think we could go overboard with that. I think it’s ineffective when we’re not dependable. If you say you’re going to have him, and you don’t. Fortunately, that has never been the case in our situation. When our first arrangement was made, I want him always. I wanted him as much as I could, and if anything, Tyler’s mom would be a little chocked at me because I’d have him too much. That worked its way out with the schedule. I make sure I’m around. If not, you know, this week it was supposed to be his mother’s week, but I got Tyler for half a week because I’m going out of town and next week was supposed to be my week.

In response to the question “What is your favorite memory of being an active father following your divorce? Jonathon states the following,

Oh so many good things. I love taking care of my daughter. I have memories of our vacations in the summer time. I love making her lunch every morning, I know that sounds corny, I love doing that, I love taking care of her. To me, it’s all been good. I’ve been fortunate that I’ve had a good child so there haven’t been any issues in raising Sara. But even when there were, and lots of late nights but you learn from that. I think we’ve grown. Sara and I are pretty tight, pretty close. Dad and daughter, no matter what we do: go golfing, or baseball, or swimming, we go on the beaches every year with our friends. We’re both very involved in each other’s lives. So for me it’s all been good. No regrets.

From the above statements, it is apparent that all five dads are extremely passionate about being involved in their children’s lives following their divorce. Rob and Jonathon speak about how much they love participating in their children’s lives. Lloyd believes that dad’s should be given an opportunity to be fully involved with their children when their relationship ends. He would have exhausted his financial resources if his ex-wife was going to apply for sole-custody through the courts. Paul and Danny talked highly about their
interaction with their children and how much they enjoy being dads. Paul spoke about parenting his daughter and how much he had to learn to be a single parent to his daughter which takes a little bit of extra work because of the gender difference. Fortunately, as noted from the previous data, all of the fathers do not take their situation for granted as they were aware that it takes communication and cooperation to effectively be a co-parent following their divorce. The hidden meaning in the data is that it would have been a crime if these dads did not get an opportunity to be active parents in their children's lives following their divorce.
The purpose of this thesis research was to gain a perspective from fathers who are in a shared parenting relationship with their ex-spouse following their divorce or separation. This research focused on shared parenting after separation, the best interest of the children, and father involvement. The research question was to identify if shared parenting after separation is in the best interest of the child. Five fathers who were actively co-parenting their children after their divorce were interviewed. The data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. In this discussion, the analysis of the data will be further discussed by addressing the five words as they relate to the research question, and the limitations of the present study will also be identified.

The Five Words

Five words/themes were identified in the analysis of the data. The data from the research participants was shared in Chapter 5 in regard to the words/themes identified. A further discussion will now occur in regard to the five words identified in the analysis of the data, and how they relate to the best interest of the children.

Time

Time is the “container” of social activities. It is thus also the container of emotional bonds. After separation, time is the gateway into the development or sustainment of close emotional bonds between children and their parents, especially where together time occurs a range of time-space contexts (sleepovers before a school day, sharing meals, doing homework, doing “day-to-day stuff”, and having fun)” (Smyth, p. 9).

Time is linked to father involvement. Fathers spending time with their children following their divorce is not a given. Smyth (2005), provides six broad patterns of father-child contact after separation as:
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Standard contact (34%), in which children see their non-resident parent each weekend or every-other-weekend.

Little or no contact (26%), where children rarely (less than once a year) or never see their non-resident parent.

Daytime-only contact (16%), in which children see their non-resident parent only during the day. Overnight stays may not occur because of co-parental conflict, a lack of space or inadequate accommodations, shift work, safety concerns, geographic distance, or for the sake of the stability of the children.

Holiday only contact (10%), where children see their non-resident parent only during school holidays. This typically occur when parents live a long way from each other.

Occasional contact (7%), where children see their non-resident parent once every three to six months. Sometimes reflecting an emotionally tenuous parent-child relationship.

Equal (or near) shared care (6%), in which children are in the care of either parent for at least 30 percent of nights a year (p. 5).

From Smyth’s study it is apparent that father’s access is often not equal. It also shows that a lot of men (26%) disengage from their children’s lives. The fathers from my research spoke highly of their time with their children following their divorce. They talked about the one-on-one time they spend with their kids, the closeness, and the bond they have developed because of the time they spent together. Time is essential in making a connection with your children that can last a lifetime. In a shared parenting arrangement, fathers are given the opportunity to actually parent their children instead of just visiting them. When both parents are given the opportunity to have equal access to their children following their divorce there is opportunity for children to continue their relationships with both parents.

Communication

An important ingredient to effective co-parenting is effective communication. With two of the research participants, communication with their ex-wives was non-existent.

According to one of the participants, lack of communication and co-operation has made his
shared parenting ineffective. The other participant was unable to directly communicate with his ex-wife, so he went through his ex-wife's current partner to talk about issues and new ideas in regard to their children. In this situation, communication in regard to the children is occurring, but through a third party. It appears that this shared parenting couple are doing the best they can despite the personal situation. It is not ideal, but as long as the children are not being directly affected by their parent's inability to communicate it appears this situation is working for this family. Unfortunately, some couples are not able to get through their pain to effectively communicate with each other. The other three participants actually sat down and had discussions in regard to their children. These families have been able to deal with their past issues and feelings in an attempt to move forward in the best interest of their child or children.

Conflict

Conflict is related to shared parenting after separation and the best interest of the children. All five fathers spoke about conflict in their shared parenting arrangement. Sadly, conflict is a part of shared parenting. Parents are leaving a marriage because they could no longer live together for one reason or another. There is a lot of stress and negative feelings attached to divorce or separation. According to the British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General (2007),

it is essential that you protect your children from witnessing arguments or violence between you and your former partner. If you are experiencing strong feelings about the separation, you may wish to find a support group or counselor who can help you work through your feelings away from your children (p. 14).

Successful shared parenting occurs when parents acknowledge that conflict in front or in close proximately of their children is not in their best interest. These parents make adjustments and concessions in an attempt to be co-operative and make the situation more
comfortable and safe for their children. Several of the fathers in the study gave examples
how they made adjustments to ensure that their shared parenting arrangement was beneficial
for everyone involved. Parents who do not have co-operation in their shared parenting
arrangement will continue to have conflict in their shared parenting arrangement, and
unfortunately often while the children are present. Effective communication is also a
valuable tool in an attempt to eliminate conflict in a co-parenting situation.

Family

Family is recognized as a
unit of interacting personalities
involved in a never-ending, never-completed
or never-fixed process.

Eshlemen and Wilson, 1998, p.56

Family is a subjective term when referring to shared parenting. Barker (2003) defines
“family as two or more people who consider themselves family and who assume obligations,
functions, and responsibilities generally essential to healthy family life” (p. 155). Two of the
fathers referred to their family as their children and their ex-wives. In these cases, their
shared parenting arrangement appeared to be co-operative and the children had open contact
with both parents. There was no indication that in both cases either parent had a new partner.
Therefore, the family had not changed except that the parents no longer live together.
Whereas, in the case of the two fathers whose co-parenting relationships were not co-
operative as the parents struggled communicating, family was referring to their bio-family or
their new family which involved a new partner. The fifth father did not identify his family,
but spoke about his son having more extended family. When discussing shared parenting,
family can be a variety of systems. It would have been interesting to get the children’s
perspective to what they identify as their family as time progressed in a shared parenting
Shared Parenting After Separation

Best Interest

Is shared parenting in the best interest of the child? Both parents being involved with their children following their children is the best for children and their families as long as safety is not an issue. From the data children want both of their parents in their lives following the divorce of their parents. Hopefully both parents want to stay involved with their children in some form or another. Shared parenting can be effective if both parents want to continue to parent their children and they are willing to co-operate and communicate with one another. The more parents can communicate and co-operate the more effective the situation will be. All of the participants had great examples of what was and was not in the best interest of children while in a shared parenting arrangement. They also provided many examples of strategies on how to make shared parenting effective. The British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General (2007) suggests,

That in most cases, it is in the best interests of the child to have a close, stable relationship with both parents whenever possible. Sometimes, this is not possible. It may not be in the best interest of the child, especially in cases where there is violence or abuse against a parent and/or children. When it is possible for both parents to maintain a close relationship with their child, the child benefits greatly, For example, having both parents involved:

- Improves the child’s emotional well-being and recovery from the separation.
- Aids in the child’s healthy emotional development.
- Helps a child from feeling divided loyalties.
- Lessens any guilt they may feel (why doesn’t the other parent want to see me?)
- Helps maintain parental authority for the child.
- Promotes parental willingness to provide financial support for the child.
- Gives the child an opportunity to develop and extended family identity.
- Demonstrates that parents can put aside personal differences enough to unite around (p. 25).

Time, Family, Conflict, Communication and Best Interest were appropriate words in

arrangement.
regard to a discussion about shared parenting after separation, the best interest of children, and father involvement. These gave a realistic description of shared parenting from a male perspective. The five words gave many examples of what is and what is not in the best interest of the children when they are a part of a shared parenting situation.

Limitations of the Present Study

For my research project, a case study was chosen as an appropriate strategy because the purpose of the study was to receive a perspective from fathers who were in a shared parenting relationship with their ex-spouse following their divorce or separation. The group of fathers who are co-parenting their children following their divorce formed the cases. A descriptive case study seemed like the best choice for offering a rich and in-depth look into this unique topic. Merriam (1988) suggests that “case study design is employed in an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p. 19). Despite its advantages, the case study is not without some limitations or disadvantages. For instance, case studies are not easily replicated so the issue of reliability may be questioned. However, a number of techniques such as triangulation were used to ensure the reliability of this study. My thesis advisor, Dr. Schmidt completed an analysis on one of research participant’s transcripts to ensure that the coding was completed with accuracy. Dr. Schmidt and this researchers words/themes were similar. The second opinion of Dr. Schmidt provided verification of the researcher’s results.

Another limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size of participants. Due to time restraints, and the number of questions asked, a limit of five participants was set. Having five research participants in this study provided a large amount of data that needed
to be analyzed. It is noted that the more research participants involved in a study, the larger the representation. If my sample size was larger, I may have received the perspective of a father who was from another ethnic group, or a father who was gay, or a father who was really young, or a father who lived in poverty. The men in my study were all over the age of thirty, and they appeared to be white middle class fathers.
My Reflection

"Reflectivity involves recognition of the researcher’s integral part of the social world being studied" Pellatt, 2003, p. 28). I will now reflect on how I affected the process and outcome of the research, the effect the research had on me, and where I am at now. I arrived at this research with an insider’s perspective as I co-parented my son for over 14 years. Shared parenting after separation is a topic that may be beneficial to various service providers and parents who need to make decisions for their children following their separation. Shared parenting after separation is becoming a popular custody choice following a divorce or separation. I wanted to hear the stories of other fathers who have chosen to stay in the children’s lives following their divorce. In my opinion shared parenting needs to be co-operative and parents need to effectively communicate with one another in order for shared parenting to be effective. When selecting participants I did not make my bias known. When looking for a referral the only requirement I had was that the participant was actively co-parenting in some form of 50-50 shared parenting arrangement for at least two years. During the interviews, I just let the participants share their story by answering my research questions. All of the fathers were aware that I had an insider’s perspective, but I did not share my story or my bias with them. I believe my bias did not intentionally affect the process of the research.

However, during the interviews I could relate to the stories of the five fathers. The participant who after two years of shared parenting was confused in regard to his
relationship with his ex-wife. He did not know if they were friends, if they were getting back together or if they were ex-partners who were co-parenting their son together. I remember the day when I was having a conversation with my ex-wife and I knew that our relationship was never going to be anything more than a co-parenting one. For me it took two or three years before I knew that we were never going to be lovers again. In regard to the two fathers who were not able to communicate with their ex-wives, personally I find that unfortunate. However, I also know the reality of how difficult it is for ex-partners to get past their personal pain. On the other hand, I was reliving my journey when I heard the stories of the two fathers who were able to sit down with ex-partners and discuss issues that affected their children. When Jonathon shared his story I was smiling from the inside because he talked about getting past his pain, at times being friends with his ex-wife, and how his family had not changed except that they live in separate houses. Jonathon was telling my story. Finally, I will never forget Paul. He was in pain and I felt his pain. In my opinion, all he wanted to do was to be an active father to his daughter following his divorce in a co-operative way. Sadly, his shared parenting arrangement had broken down and his access revoked. He had to return to court to fight for access to his daughter. I do not know the whole story, but I definitely believe that his child is being affected the most because she was unable to continue her relationship with her father. Meeting these five men for that one hour has given me more insight of how rewarding and how difficult it is to co-parent children following a divorce. This insight will help me as I continue my career in the helping profession as a child protection social worker.

Doing this research has not been a gentle ride for me. I now know how insecure I am
when it comes to academia and sharing my story. I wanted to broaden my horizons in regard to employment when I first took on the endeavor of doing a master’s degree in social work. I am not sure that I would have taken this project on if someone told me that it was going to be such a struggle for me. In regard to my story, the research participants are anonymous, but my story is there for everyone to see. I had a tough time putting my life on paper, but my story is about a dad staying involved with his child following his separation. My story provides a completed version of a shared parenting situation as my son is now an adult. Pouring over my journals brought back lots of memories. Some of the memories were pleasant and others reminded me of my personal struggles. What I read the most as I went through my journals was how hurt my son was because of his parent’s divorce. He went back and forth every other week for 14 years, but when he was angry he made it clear that his parent’s divorce had ruined his life. In the beginning I had trouble accepting my son’s feelings because I thought I was doing such positive things by staying in his life. Today, I am aware that children of divorce are affected the most. It does not matter how involved or co-operative everyone is, children’s lives are changed forever. After completing this research project I believe it is time for me to start a new chapter in my life. I am going burn my old journals and start my next chapter with a new journal. Definitely my new chapter in life will include some kind of support or advocacy for men who want to remain as active fathers in their child’s life following their divorce or separation.

In my final segment of reflection, I have been a father for 22 years and I hope there are many more years to come. Being a dad has become a major part of life, and I was blessed when I was given the opportunity to remain an active dad in my son’s life following my
separation. I am grateful that my ex-wife was able to get past her pain and engage in a co-parenting relationship in a co-operative manner. I have many memories of the positive things we did together in an attempt to ensure our son’s well-being as we parented from separate households. For me I have not slept well since my marriage ended. Taking on the role of being a single dad or co-parent that was unfamiliar to me left me with lots of uncertainty and sleepless nights. I also had to change careers which heightened my uncertainty in my life. What I do know for sure is that I am a better man today because I did not run from my pain, and I faced my fears. Communication is and always will be a struggle for me, but I was forced to learn some skills in order to communicate effectively because of my shared parenting situation. When I reflect on my life I always state that I have failed in the area of relationships because I am still single after being separated from my marriage for over 17 years. I have had three long term relationships since my marriage ended that have never worked out. However, upon further reflection I have been successful in a co-parenting relationship with my ex-wife. All relationships are tough, but recreating a healthy relationship to co-parent your child after your marriage ends has to be worth something. Furthermore, I am reminded every day when I have either phone contact or physical contact with my 22-year-old son that I have a decent relationship with my child.

**Future Research**

Shared parenting after separation is becoming a common choice as a custody arrangement following a separation. This research is from a male perspective. Therefore, it only provided a one-sided view of an arrangement that involves other people. It was important to hear the voices of fathers because this type of parenting arrangement has
improved father’s chances of staying involved in their child’s lives following their divorce. However, shared parenting is a family affair. Future research could include a mother and father who are parenting their children together following their divorce. Three or four couples would be a good sample size to receive the stories of parents who are parenting together following their divorce. Future research could also include a case study of a family who are parenting together from separate households. All of the family members including the children would be interviewed. It would also be interesting to hear the voices of children in a shared parenting arrangement. The children could be currently living in a shared parenting situation or who are now adults, but were raised by parents who lived in separate households. I am sure my son would love to share his story in regard to his experience living in two households following his parent’s divorce.

Suggestions

Throughout the data from the five fathers, there was a strong message that supports for fathers are lacking. None of the fathers had accessed supports throughout their shared parenting arrangement. One of the participants had gone to counseling to deal with undisclosed issues, but there was no mention of any of the fathers accessing supports through various agencies that offered this type of service. The John Howard Society in Prince George at one time ran a group for fathers who were attempting to get more access to their children. I was involved in Fathers Outreach Program through the Prince George John Howard Society as a volunteer in February of 2005. Sadly, the program was terminated because the funding did not get issued for April 1, 2005 (M. Ferguson, personal communication, March 31, 2005). I checked with the John Howard Society in 2010, but the
funding was never reinstated. Since 2001, I have seen several First Nations organizations such Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS) in Prince George offer support groups for fathers, but they were never long term groups. There is definitely a need for support groups for fathers such as the Fathers Outreach Program. Unfortunately, services for men are hard to come by as it appears governments are not willing to spend money for service for men. If government dollars are not available perhaps volunteer services may be an option. The volunteers could be fathers who are or who have co-parented their children following their separation.

As stated earlier I was able to attend a two day presentation in April 2006 put on by the Father Involvement Initiative (FII) – Ontario Network. The focus was encouraging father involvement while in partnership with the child’s mother. This type of support is crucial because it encourages fathers to be involved with their children from birth instead of taking on the stereotypical role of being the bread winner, and child care being the mother’s job. Father involvement should be encouraged before the baby is born. If both parents are involved since the birth of the child, parents are able and willing to be involved with their children no matter what happens. It is stated that children are better off if they have two healthy and active parents involved in their lives. The FII needs to continue to put on workshop to service providers in order for agencies to be become more father friendly.

The Province of British Columbia offers a three hour parenting course called Parenting After Separation: For Your Child’s Future to parents and families where a separation has occurred. In some communities in British Columbia, parents must attend the Parenting After Separation course before going to court on matters such as custody, access,
guardianship, and/or child support (British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General, 2007).

In 2006, I attended this program for research purposes only (Appendix D). Every participant received a 48 page booklet with information regarding parenting after separation. During the three hour session the booklet was discussed. There was valuable information in the three hour session, but in my view more needs to be offered. This three hour session had some valuable information in regard to shared parenting, but follow up sessions for individuals who are interested should be offered. One of the research participants mentioned that he had taken the Parenting After Separation Course, but he did not find it valuable for an undisclosed reason.

Several of the participants mentioned that there should be services available to couples in an attempt to work out their difference before the relationship ends. There should be a counseling center for couples similar to what the province offers for addictions (drugs, alcohol, and gambling). Counselors would be available to work with couples and families. There would be no cost to this service as is the case with many mental health and addiction services. Parents who are in a shared parenting arrangement and are not being effective with their co-operation and communication could also access this service. A Family Therapeutic Centre could improve marital relationships which could affect the lives of many children. The focus would be on families, which is often mentioned in various political platforms. In the last couple of years of my marriage, my wife and I went to a marriage seminar and marriage counseling in an attempt to keep the marriage alive. Unfortunately, nothing seemed to work. I believe that I thought the marriage was broken and the only way to fix it was to leave. Today I know the difference. The grass is not greener on
the other side, and my son was affected with our marriage ending. I am not saying that I wish I would have stayed in the marriage for my son’s benefit, but I wish I could have become healthy enough so there was an improvement in the marriage.

Conclusion

This study sought to reveal if shared parenting after separation is in the best interest of The child. The purpose of this study was to get the perspective of fathers on this issue. Separation and divorce is hurtful to all family members. Often the children are affected the most. Shared parenting after separation is one way of keeping the family intact. Up until the last decade or so, sole custody (generally to the mother) was awarded in most custody decisions following a divorce. Joint custody (usually referring to joint guardianship, primary residence with the mother) now has become a popular custody decision in an attempt to keep fathers involved when marriages ends. Many fathers want to be active parents following their divorce. Joint physical custody (shared parenting) is where the access to the children is somewhat equal. Children are parented by both parents from separate households. A common shared parenting arrangement is where the children live a week-on-week-off with either parent.

There should be no argument that it is in the best interest of the children to have a close, stable and ongoing relationship with both parents whenever possible after families separate. Shared parenting after separation is an effective way to keep both parents actively involved in their children’s lives. The fathers of the research project spoke passionately about their time they had with children in their shared parenting arrangement. They gave descriptive examples of being available to their children everyday of their lives and participating in the
everyday situations of being a parent. This research project also identified that if shared parenting is going to be effective, both parents need to be co-operative and they need to be able to communicate with each other in regard to their children.

However, it may not be in the best interest of the child to have on-going relationships with both parents especially in cases where there is violence or abuse against a parent and/or children. Children should not be exposed to any form of physical violence. Parental conflict (arguing and yelling) is common when parents first separate because emotions are often high. However, for shared parenting to be effective and in the best interest of the children, parents need to make adjustments and develop strategies to ensure that their children are not subjected to on-going parental conflict. Children’s lives are changed forever when their parents’ relationship ends. Effective shared parenting is one way to reduce the emotional pain as children live through their parents’ divorce. In an effective shared parenting arrangement children can have meaningful relationships with both their parents as they live in separate households.
References


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MEMORANDUM

To: Jack Kinnear
CC: Glen Schmidt

From: Henry Harder, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: February 9, 2010

Re: E2010.1216.210
Co-parenting after separation: A male perspective

Thank you for submitting the above-noted research proposal and requested amendments to the Research Ethics Board. Your proposal has been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the Research Ethics Board.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Henry Harder
Appendix B: Research Participant Information Sheet

Student Researcher's name: Jack Kinnear
Phone Number: 250 565 6876 (work)
Supervisor's name: Glen Schmidt, Associate Professor, UNBC Social Work Program
Phone Number: 250 960 6519
Title of project: Co-parenting After Separation: A Male Perspective
Type of project: Master Social Work Thesis

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your interest in this research project and for your potential willingness to answer questions pertaining to your family. The purpose of this research is to gather your personal thoughts, feelings, reflections and experiences regarding the best interests of children who are being co-parented following a divorce or separation. It is my goal that you will have the opportunity to share information that you feel is important for people to know, based on your real and lived experience as a father who is co-parenting his children following your divorce or separation. It is my hope that your words and experiences will be the data used to educate and inform members of our community about co-parenting after separation.

You are chosen as a father who is actively co-parenting his children following your divorce or separation. Your responsibility as a participant is to take part in an interview with the researcher. This interview will be based on eleven selected questions and eight information questions pertaining to co-parenting following a divorce or separation. In order to accurately reflect your responses to the interview questions I will be tape recording our conversation. I am estimating that this interview will take approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes.

The materials used to record your information will be kept in a locked cupboard at the home of the researcher's until the end of the research project. At the end of the project (anticipated date is August, 2010), the audio recording will either be returned to you, or destroyed via a wood burning stove. Jack Kinnear and UNBC will use their best efforts to ensure identity is not revealed. The information you provide will be reflected in the final thesis, however anonymity will be maintained. Access to the interview transcripts will be limited to myself, to my research supervisor and to a professional transcriber. The professional transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure anonymity.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you choose to be a participant in this research, you may withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw as a participant of this study, documentation of the information provided will be returned to you, or destroyed. The potential benefits of this study includes the chance to inform readers of the thesis the strengths, benefits and challenges of co-parenting following a divorce or separation from a male perspective. Your experiences, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings could provide
insight to fathers who are currently co-parenting their children, or to fathers who are considering to remain actively involved in their child’s life following their divorce. I believe there is no potential risk of this study.

Your name, identity and family information will be kept in strict confidence. Pseudonyms will be used and any identifying information will be kept confidential. If any questions arise, the researcher can be contacted by email at jkinnearpg@shaw.ca. At the end of the data analysis, all participants will have an opportunity to meet with the researcher, and/or to receive a copy of the results. Any complaints about this project should be directed to the Office of Research, UNBC, 250 960-5650 or email reb@unbc.ca.

Information from participants before the questions:

1  How long have you been separated?
2  How long have you co-parented?
3  What is the living arrangement? (bi-weekly etc.)
4  How many children? (the ages and sexes of the children)
5  Is this arrangement through the courts or was this a personal arrangement?
6  Have you remarried or are you living with a new partner?
7  How old were you when you were married and when you separated?
8  What was your relationship with your father like?

The questions:

1) What was shared parenting like before the separation?

2) What is shared parenting like after separation?

3) How have your children been affected by your separation?

4) What is effective shared parenting and what is ineffective shared parenting?

5) What changes or adjustments have you made to make shared parenting effective?

6) What is in the best interest of the child when parents separate?

7) Tell me what is not in the best interest of the child when parents are co-parenting?

8) What strategies do you and your children’s mother use to make shared parenting in the best interest of the child?

9) As a father, tell me what it has been like being an active parent in your children’s lives following your divorce or separation?
10) What supports have you used to be an effective co-parent and/or what supports are missing for fathers as they embark on the journey of co-parenting after separation?

11) What is your favorite memory of being an active father following your divorce?
Appendix C: Research Participant Consent Form

I understand that Jack Kinnear, who is a graduate student in the Masters of Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, is conducting a research project pertaining to parenting after separation.

I understand the purpose of this research project is to gain awareness, insight and information regarding my personal experience as a father who is co-parenting after separation.

I understand I was chosen because I am a father who is actively co-parenting his child/children after separation. I will be interviewed by the researcher based on eleven questions pertaining to my experience as a father who is co-parenting after separation.

1. This consent is given on the understanding that Jack Kinnear will use his best efforts to guarantee that my identity is protected and my confidentiality maintained, both directly and indirectly.

2. I give my consent freely and understand that I may terminate the interview at any point and can withdraw from the research process at any time.

3. I understand and agree that the information I have given to Jack Kinnear in our interview will be treated in the following manner.

   a) tape interviews will be taken during our discussion
   b) this data will be securely stored by Jack Kinnear, only in a locked compartment in his private residence
   c) the data will be used only by Jack Kinnear and only for his thesis project
   d) the data will either be returned to me or destroyed via a wood burning stove at the end of the thesis project

4. I understand that if I have any comments or concerns, I can contact the Office of Research at reb@unbc.ca, 250 960-5650.

5. A copy of this agreement will be retained by all parties to the interview.

   NAME: ___________________________ SIGNED: ___________________________ DATE: ___________________________

   RESEARCHER: __________________ SIGNED: ___________________________ DATE: ___________________________