

DISSERTATION

FATHERS NURTURING THEIR CHILDREN POST-DIVORCE:

THE FATHERS' PERSPECTIVE

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

FATHERS NURTURING THEIR CHILDREN POST-DIVORCE:  
THE FATHERS' PERSPECTIVE

Nurturing requires engagement and engagement can be difficult to achieve if a father does not, due to divorce, share as much time with his children as he did previously. Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach, this study solicited from divorced fathers a description of their experience nurturing their children post-divorce. While much research focuses on the need of children for their father to *be there*; this study focused on the fathers' need to *be there*.

The data in this study—the divorced fathers' voices—described nurturing post-divorce as a composite of both external actions and situations, and internal feelings. Overall, the data reflected the desire and commitment of these fathers to maintain, or rebuild, a nurturing relationship with their children. Two general observations emerged from these fathers' stories: that the “loss” of their children through divorce brought to light just how precious their fathering role was, and that often times fathers' relationships with their children were enhanced post-divorce.

However, while *being there* was the common “thread” that ran through the post-divorce nurturing experience, the meaning of *being there* varied from father to father. Therefore, even if the “essence” of nurturing post-divorce is *being there*, *being there* is changeable, and experienced differently, by every divorced father.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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And finally, to my great grandfather Gustav Berg. Who, 100 years ago as an ambitious immigrant from Sweden in search of the "American Dream," had the foresight to buy stock in a little German brewery in St. Louis...as a gift for *his daughter* Mabel. I wonder if he knew how far that gift would go?

## DEDICATION

To Alexandra Nicole Kosan

Because you *deserve* the best dad in the whole world (and you got him!).

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## I – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*Fatherhood is not just a role—provider, disciplinarian, friend—it's also a relationship, one that transforms us as much as our kids.*

*Samuel Osherson. The Passions of Fatherhood. 1995.*

### Background

Reports indicate that 60 percent of marriages end in divorce, a trend that affects the lives of one million children (Robbins, 2008). When a family breaks up, the family system shifts and new roles and new rules emerge. During such transitions fathers also cannot be certain what “rules” apply because the rules that guide relationship interactions are in need of redefinition (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). There is no single, dominant model for fatherhood (Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009), let alone a model to guide fathering post-divorce. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) reported that both nonresidential and residential divorced fathers can feel “confused or apprehensive” about parenting and about their parenting role. As role expectations are altered, society lacks guidelines to clarify the noncustodial father’s role (Stone, 2001). There is a need to define “effective fatherhood” as a norm of male behavior (Lehr & MacMillian, 2001).

The fathering role is complex; the definition of fathering is evolving. Fathering is complex because it represents a composite of factors, including individual personality, family history, social patterning, socialization, and external structures, in particular the workplace (Dowd, 2000). Dowd wrote that fathering is not static; fathering changes in

relation to “age and development of the parent, as well as in relation to the number, age, gender, and development state of the child” (Dowd, 2000, p. 39-40). It is generally recognized that the concept of fathering is incredibly “fluid” and “dynamic” and can evolve in a generation, or even within an individual’s lifetime (Dowd, 2000; Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). Contemporary fatherhood is less clearly defined than in the past and social expectations for fathers, as compared to the actual practices of fathering, have become more varied (Forste et al., 2009).

### Purpose of the Study

This study explored fathers’ post-divorce experience of nurturing as one function of the overall father role. The traditional role of father as “breadwinner” or provider can still be fulfilled post-divorce, without contact or interaction, through child support. The role of nurturer, however, can be diminished or damaged through shared or limited custody, particularly for the non-custodial parent. Loss of contact, and thus loss of the nurturing role, can be devastating to both the fathers and the children (Pruett, 1987). This single function was chosen because nurturing requires engagement and this engagement can be difficult to achieve if a father does not, due to divorce, share as much time with his children and therefore have the same opportunity to engage in a nurturing role as fathers in intact families (Amato & Gilbreath, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to solicit from divorced fathers a description—in their own voices—of their nurturing experience post-divorce. The purpose was both exploratory and descriptive: (a) to develop a greater understanding of how divorced fathers experience their nurturing role (exploratory), and (b) to use their experiences to help bring form and clarity to this role (descriptive) (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

## Research Question

Despite considerable cultural and social change, many fathers still feel tremendous pressure to fulfill the three Ps—provider, protector, and procreator (Andronico & Horne, 2004). Fathers, however, need to be seen as more than providers; they need to be seen as “emotionally involved” as well (Dowd, 2000). Nurturing embodies emotional involvement. Unfortunately, insight into divorced fathers’ nurturing role is lacking. Using a qualitative methodology and phenomenological approach, this study explores fathers’ experience nurturing their children post-divorce and how these experiences shape the meaning of fathering.

In qualitative research, the research question is often merely a starting point—not a definitive structure—as research questions often emerge or evolve during the research process, facilitating a better understanding of the research problems (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). My research question was intended to solicit fathers’ experiences of nurturing their children post-divorce. The question was broad—How do fathers experience their role as a nurturing parent post-divorce?—and remained broad and singular throughout the process.

## Potential Significance

Silverstein (2002) wrote that “many studies continue to draw conclusions about fathers without actually speaking to them” (p. 56). Other fathering researchers have noted that much of the research on fathering is actually based on mothers, or what is known as a “mother bias” (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Andrews, Luckey, Bolden, Whiting-Fickling, & Lind, 2004; Cabrera, Brooks-Gunn, Moore, Bronte-Tinkew, Halle, West, et al., 2004; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Silverstein, 2002). When research does consider

fathers, efforts generally have been directed toward creating ways to measure father involvement; although frequently what is measured is family work (quantitative) rather than the father-child relationship (qualitative).

What we are lacking is the voice of the fathers. Numerous researchers have expressed a need for qualitative research on fathers' voices and experiences (Andrews, et al., 2004; Cabrera, et al., 2004; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Lamb, & Boller, 1999; Gadsen, Fagan, Ray, & Davis, 2004; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000; Stone, 2001). Therefore, one outcome of this research will be to expand and deepen knowledge and understanding of a father's experience of nurturing his children post-divorce, based on the reflections and descriptions of fathers themselves.

This research will contribute rich descriptions to the existing body of knowledge of fathers' experiences fathering post-divorce. It will contribute to our collective understanding of fathers' post-divorce nurturing experience as expressed by the fathers themselves. That understanding, along with the fathers' own words, will contribute to greater understanding of fathering post-divorce for non-custodial fathers.

Another outcome would be further definition and clarity of the nurturing role as exercised by fathers. Role theory is proposed as a framework for studying fathers nurturing their children post-divorce—including role clarity and role transition. If “[R]oles are sets of expectations or behaviors associated with positions in social structures” (Payne, 1997, p. 160) fatherhood can be considered a role. Greater understanding of father roles post-divorce, particularly the nurturing role, can lead to changes in the family courts, to changes in the baseline assumptions about who is best

suited to parent children, and to changes in the stereotypical assignment of parental responsibility based solely on gender.

### Researcher's Perspective

In my personal life, I have had a “front row seat” from which to observe the emotional havoc that can occur when a father is separated from his child. I have witnessed firsthand the experiences and emotions of a father whose relationship with his daughter and role in her life were severely restricted for several years by divorce. It is these experiences that have driven me to pursue this research. Moustakas (1994) believes that personal significance to the researcher is a critical element of phenomenology:

In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus. (p. 104)

My own experiences will undoubtedly contribute to the lens through which I view this proposed research. It is important, therefore, that I understand that qualitative research is “value laden and that biases are present” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17). I will engage in self-reflection so that I may bracket my biases, thoughts, and perceptions so that they do not interfere with the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

As a counseling practitioner, I am interested in how divorced fathers cope with this emotional trauma and stress, how they process their feelings, and how and if they seek help when faced with an emotional crisis as the result of divorce. In general, I am concerned for divorced fathers' emotional well-being, I am concerned for their ability to parent effectively, and I am concerned for their ability to successfully negotiate the family court system.



My research was also influenced by my personal world view and paradigm, which is influenced by social constructivism, advocacy, and pragmatism. As a social constructivist, I seek to understand the world in which I live and work; to develop subjective meanings that are often influenced by social context and historical precedence (Creswell, 2007). Roles are socially constructed and therefore a social constructivist perspective is appropriate in trying to understand how divorced fathers experience their nurturing role in the larger social context. Advocacy as a paradigm looks to research to contain an action agenda, and that as a result of that agenda, reform can occur that can change lives, institutions, or even the researcher (Creswell, 2007). My long-term goal is to work in and with the legal and mental health systems to bring more parity to fathers in the divorce process, therefore, advocacy as a paradigm is also appropriate. Finally, as a pragmatist, I am focused on the outcome of my research, the “actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry—rather than antecedent conditions” (Creswell, 2007, p. 22). Pragmatists desire to stop asking questions and begin to take action (Creswell, 2007). I am ready to move towards action. I will use the results of my research to work more effectively and compassionately with my clients, to support my role as an advocate for fathers, and to negotiate with existing institutions (i.e. the courts) for change.

#### Delimitations and Limitations

As I have moved towards my dissertation, I have been reminded many times that this process is only a very small part of a bigger picture; that the research is equivalent to a “dot” the size of a pencil point on paper in terms of its scope. Logically, it follows that there are necessary delimitations and limitations.

## **Delimitations**

There were three primary delimitations to this study: (a) the study focused on only one component of the larger construct of fathering—nurturing; (b) the study focused on divorced fathers, not fathers in general; and (c) that as a researcher I assumed a distinction between full-time and part-time fathering. These delimitations are discussed in more detail below.

1. Choosing to explore only one role allowed for greater focus and thus depth in the research. This single function was chosen because nurturing is essentially engagement and divorced fathers frequently face barriers to engagement. It is often difficult for fathers who do not share a residence with the children to engage in their parental role (Amato and Gilbreath, 1999). It is my belief that the traditional father role of “breadwinner” or provider can still be fulfilled without contact or interaction through child support, while the parental role of nurturing (more traditionally considered a female role) is often interrupted through shared or limited custody if the father becomes the non-residential or non-custodial parent, although Finley, Mira, and Schwartz (2008) report the opposite.
2. The second delimitation refers to fathers who have access to their children less than 100 percent of the time as a result of divorce; such fathers were considered “part-time” fathers in this study. Fathers who have full custody and 100 percent access to their children post-divorce were not included in this study. It is interesting to note that in framing my research and research question, I often referred to divorced fathers as “part-time dads” rather than

“full-time dads.” This phrasing generated comments (almost exclusively from women) such as, “are there ever any full-time dads?” I believe that this is an unfair characterization of fathers and further justification of the need for this research.

3. I am specifically interested in fathers whose “fathering” time has been reduced due to divorce and the resulting institutional constraints because I believe that the less time fathers spend with their children, the fewer opportunities they have to nurture them.

An additional (but not primary) delimitation was that fathers from strictly same sex partnerships, who subsequently separate but share custody, were not included. Divorced fathers who are homosexual could participate in this study so long as they were in a heterosexual marriage prior to divorce. This is not to say that there might not have been significant contributions to be gleaned from interviewing fathers in same sex marriages. However, the institutional and legal complications of same-sex marriage/divorce might have served as a complicating factor to this study.

### **Limitations**

As discussed, this study was limited specifically to divorced fathers whose parenting time had been reduced, limited, or constrained. This reflects the purpose of the study and the research question. Further limitations arose from the sampling method proposed, which needed to be “purposeful,” in other words, not left to chance. To achieve this, the participants needed to (a) have experienced the phenomenon, and (b) possess the ability to “adequately reflect on their experience and verbally describe it” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). Participants self-selected to participate and participation was limited by an

individual's willingness and desire to reflect on this part of their life. I did anticipate that some participants might initially agree to participate only to subsequently withdraw from the research if the process of reflecting dredges up old or unhealed wounds or becomes too painful. This did, in fact, occur.

Participants needed to have been awarded their final divorce in Colorado. Otherwise limitations on participants were minimal as they did not need to be of any particular socio-economic status, ethnicity, education, or other demographic factors. Because this was a sample of fathers who self-selected to participate, there were no limitations related to gatekeepers or "site access" (there is no single site).

One issue I did encounter was the issue of participant racial/ethnic diversity. It was very difficult, and in the end impossible in some cases, to find participants of color. As a result, I included the interview of one father of color who, although separated for eight years, is not divorced from his daughter's mother.

Ethical considerations were also a potential limitation. Confidentiality between researcher and participant needed to be addressed. Because the research pertained to fathers' relationships with their children, the researcher's role as a mandated reporter in Colorado in the event of disclosure (i.e., child abuse) was made clear but did not become an issue. Information on additional mental health resources was prepared in advance and made available in the event a participant needed further counseling as a result of the interview process; none of the participants expressed a need for this information.

Another potential limitation was the question as to whether I, as a female, could truly "hear" what the all male participants were saying about their experience. According to Cameron (2001), what a participant says, and how he says it, may be impacted by any

number of preconceptions and understandings—of the interview process, of the interviewer (who is female), of the “language” spoken in the interview, and so on. As Cameron points out, due to gendered childhood and adolescent language socialization, communication between men and women is often akin to “cross-cultural” communications (p. 117). During the interviews, I drew upon skills as a counselor to establish rapport with the participants; I focused on remaining neutral and non-judgmental as they told their stories. As a result, I did not sense that the participants felt I was unable to “hear” their stories. To the contrary, most expressed gratitude that someone, anyone, was willing to listen.

Finally, it was not expected that the results of this study would be generalized to a larger population; although this may be a limitation in a quantitative study, it is not so for a qualitative one. Individual narratives are so highly personal that it is difficult to generalize and therefore generalization is rarely expected. Polkinghorne (2005) explains this as follows:

The focus of statistical research is to make claims about a population on the basis of the study of a sample of that population ... it requires a random or representative selection of data sources ... The focus of qualitative inquiry is on describing, understanding, and clarifying human experience. (p. 139)

### Definitions of Terms

*Father:* “Father” has become a complex construct in today’s society and paternal rights and responsibilities can be hard to pin down. Fathers can be biological, adoptive, step; they can be “informal,” “social,” or “psychological.” Fathers can be biological, married, and living with mothers; biological but never married and living with mothers;

unmarried, non-biological, and living with mothers, and so on (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000).

- *Full-time father:* For the purpose of this study, full-time is defined as residential fathers in an intact family (non-divorced), or divorced fathers who have been awarded full (100%) parental responsibility for their children, where no institutional restrictions have been placed on time spent with children (i.e. partial custody or restricted/supervised visitation). Neither of these types of fathers was included in this study.
- *Part-time father:* For purposes of this study, part-time father will be defined as divorced non-residential fathers (biological or adoptive) who were previously married to their children's mother, who lived as a part of an intact family, who were residential, and whose continuing relationship with their children has been constrained in some way as a result of divorce (i.e. shared custody, non-custodial, or restricted/supervised visitation).

*Nurturing:* For purposes of this study, nurturing will be defined as a father's positive engagement, warmth, accessibility, and responsibility. Nurturing includes sensitivity to children's emotional needs, effective communication, support in times of stress, and knowledge and interest in children's activities (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997).

## II – LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This literature review focuses on locating the research topic within the larger context of fathering literature; it serves as the base from which the research was pursued. The literature reviewed outlines the underlying assumptions and the research and intellectual traditions around defining fathering, fathering research, research methods employed when studying fathering, role and identity theory, defining nurturance, and ends with a brief discussion of problems or tensions in the field.

### Defining Fathering

Numerous researchers have written that the fathering role is complex; that the definition of fathering is evolving. Dowd (2002) acknowledged this complexity, describing “involved fathering” as “grounded in individual personality and family history, social patterning and socialization, and external structures, especially the workplace” (p. 42). In addition to the societal variability, there is the internal variability of each father as well. Fathering is not a static process. How one fathers is not a constant. It changes as the father changes; it changes as the child changes (Dowd, 2000). Dowd wrote that the concept of fathering is incredibly fluid; it can evolve in a generation, or even within an individual’s lifetime.

Scholars representing various perspectives have called for a redefinition of fathering. Fathers traditionally have been defined in terms of a provider role; that definition needs to be expanded to include a definition of fathers as emotionally involved

as well (Dowd, 2000). From a feminist perspective, fathering needs to be redefined and traditional masculine ideology reconstructed (Dowd, 2000). The men's movement has also emphasized shared parenting rights and a nurturing role for fathers, but to less effect on society so far (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). More recently, Marks and Palkovitz (2004) noted that the contemporary fathering "pendulum" is actually swinging back towards how men engaged in fathering in colonial America. During that period, fathers were highly involved, filling numerous paternal roles including "pedagogue, guidance counselor, benefactor, moral overseer, psychologist, model, progenitor, companion, caregiver, disciplinarian, and provider" (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004, p. 115).

#### Evolution of Research on Fathers

Fathering has been a research interest since at least the turn of the last century. Over time, the concept of fathering has been flexible and evolving, albeit narrow (Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Day, et al., 2000). Early conceptualizations included the breadwinner, the disciplinarian, and the moral educator (Lamb, 2000). Fathering research in the 1950s divided fathering into instrumental functions (providing, disciplining) versus expressive functions (care giving, companionship, sharing leisure activities) (Finley et al., 2008). Also in the 1950s, Bowlby introduced attachment theory, which focused on maternal deprivation. As a result, parenting research shifted to an almost "single-minded focus on mothers, and seriously undervalued the potential for influence by others (including fathers, siblings, and peers)" (Lamb, 2000, p. 29). In the 1970s, research shifted again and began to focus on father involvement, but only from a very narrow perspective of "time-use studies"; other ways fathers could contribute to their families outside of direct interaction was ignored (Lamb, 2000).



Over the past 30 years, scholars have begun to study fathering systematically and from a scientific perspective, rather than an historical or social perspective. Fathering researchers began to focus on a new fathering role, one that would allow fathers to nurture their children from infancy onward (Levant & Wimer, 2010). The idea of the “new nurturant” father emerged in the mid-1970s and was followed in the 1980s with the idea of “new fatherhood,” which suggested that what fathers do in the “modern” era is different than what they have done in the past (Lamb, 2000). As the breadwinner model declined, a new model emerged to take its place, that of the “involved” father, one who is emotionally connected with his children (Forste et al., 2009). More recent conceptualizations reflect more equal parenting partnerships (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, & Guzman, 2006, p. 254) and include a father who is more invested in family relations and child care. As a result of this shift, fathers are now being viewed as “more expressive, intimate, and involved in the day-to-day rearing of children” (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2009, p. 54). Marks and Palkovitz (2004) suggest that these “new” roles are “more resurgent than novel” (p. 115).

#### Methodological Approaches in Fathering Research

As recently as 2000, research on fathering still employed almost exclusively quantitative measures. In their study on fathering scholarship, however, Marsiglio, Amato, et al. (2000) referenced the use of ethnography and in-depth qualitative interviewing in the context of father pre- and postnatal experiences, indicating that such approaches might contribute to a richer understanding of how fathers construct and negotiate their self-images as fathers. The researchers also referenced the need to create a “richer portrait” of how fatherhood is viewed from the perspective of different cultures

and social backgrounds (Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000), which could be interpreted to be a reference to the use of qualitative methodologies.

Numerous researchers have expressed a need for qualitative research involving fathers' voices and experiences (Andrews, et al., 2004; Cabrera, et al., 2004; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 1999; Forste et al., 2009; Gadsen et al., 2004; Madden-Derdich, & Leonard, 2000; Stone, 2001). In 1996, Dudley wrote that qualitative studies were valuable because they provided "firsthand, naturalistic data that are not necessarily bound by previous explanations of phenomenon" (p. 412). Since 2000, researchers have increasingly used qualitative methods to capture the voices of fathers and their experiences. For example, Lehr and MacMillan (2001) used a focus group approach to examine the experiences of young, noncustodial fathers as they tried to remain engaged with their children. Hallman, Dienhart, and Beaton (2007) employed a symbolic interactionist and constructionist perspective in a grounded theory approach to explore divorced fathers' experiences of time (often described via metaphor) with their children. Forste et al. (2009) used an interpretive life course perspective and grounded theory approach to explore how fathers define their fathering role based on their experiences with their own fathers, focusing on economic constraints, absence of marriage, fathering role models, and men's perceptions of fathering roles.

Examples of research on fathers post-divorce using qualitative (or mixed) methodology also come from a number of relevant dissertations. Browne (1998) used hermeneutic phenomenology to explore what it means to be a divorced, noncustodial father through accounts of their experiences, while Simon (1995) conducted an exploratory study into the factors that influence nonresidential fathers' disengagement

post-divorce. Farley (2006) identified a lack of emphasis on father's perspectives in his study of how men's perceptions of fathering changed during their transition from live-in father to non-residential father. He analyzed data using the principles of grounded theory and identified two categories that he labeled separation and coping strategies. Charles (2006) used a mixed methodology to examine the lived experiences of noncustodial fathers and to explore how nonresidential fathers maintained their parenting role identities.

### Theoretical Framework: Role and Identity Theory

Qualitative researchers set forth the theoretical assumptions that form the foundation of the study (Fassinger, 2005). The theoretical framework for this inquiry is based in role and identity theory. A brief examination of these theories, particularly in the context of fathering, fatherhood, or family might help to frame the research, particularly the interview questions. It is not my intent, however, to conduct an exhaustive review of the literature on role and identity theories because that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Marsiglio, Amato, et al. (2000) noted that scholars who study the subjective experiences of men using identity theory are relatively new, although committed, to the area of study. Role and identity theory are proposed as a framework for studying fathers' nurturing role post-divorce as they can be closely or interrelated constructs. Roles are expectations or behaviors associated with positions in the social structure (Payne, 1997); defined as such, nurturing can be considered a role. Role theory addresses how we interact with others and how we respond to the expectations of others in a particular way. Roles also reflect certain behaviors as they relate to positions in social structures (Payne,

1997). Identity exists within the framework of “structured social relationships” and social relationships require that individuals occupy “positions,” which in turn are labeled as “roles” because they carry shared behavioral expectations (Stryker, 1968). William James’ vision of identity was that people can have as many different selves as they have groups they interact with. In other words, James believed that a person can have as many identities as positions they occupy and roles they play within their network of relationships (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) most clearly combined the two concepts when they wrote,

Role identity is described as a combination of objective societal expectations and subjective personal meanings that one attributes to oneself in a given position, such as that of parent or spouse ... Individual behavior is subsequently influenced by the societal expectations and personal meanings one attributes to a role. (p. 256)

Roles and identity are relevant to fathers and the study of fathering as being a “good father” is frequently viewed in the context of a social role obligation (Andrews et al., 2004; Bronte-Tinkew, et al., 2006). Flannery Quinn (2009) wrote that “fatherhood is a socially constructed gender role that is mediated by culture” (p. 140). The male or fathering role traditionally emphasizes traits such as independence, self-reliance, competitiveness, and achievement (Andronico & Horne, 2004); whereas, mothers are considered to be more competent in and central to the realm of child care and child well-being (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). The aforementioned beliefs have contributed to a certain “motherhood mystique” as it relates to the roles fathers and mothers occupy in parenting.

Researchers have looked at fathering roles and the part fathers play in creating these roles. Some have explored the reciprocal process that occurs between men,

children, mothers, and others as they negotiate that role (Marsiglio, Amato, et al. 2000). Others have written that fathers are actively engaged in creating their fathering identities, identities that are generally comprised of perceptions, beliefs, and expectations (Bronte-Tinkew, et al., 2006; Forste et al., 2009; Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000). Researchers have noted that it will become increasingly important for future researchers to explore “how fathering roles are defined, negotiated, and expressed in...transitional periods...” (Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000, p. 1186).

### Nurturing Fathers

The role of father as nurturer is couched within the broader role of fathering in general. Traditionally, the male or fathering role has emphasized traits such as independence, self-reliance, competitiveness, and achievement (Andronico & Horne, 2004), characteristics not necessarily aligned with nurturing. However, in her book, *Do Men Mother*, Andrea Doucet (2006) wrote that research has found that fathers do in fact have both the desire and the ability to be protective, nurturing, affectionate, and responsive to their children. Pruett (1993) had found as well that fathers have an “essential nurturing function” (p. 46). Fatherhood is socially constructed and mediated by culture (Flannery Quinn, 2009); as social expectations for fathers have shifted, it has been recognized that fathers are, in fact, capable of nurturing their children (a role long assigned only to mothers) (Wall & Levy, 1994).

### Defining Nurturance

The construct of nurturing is variously defined as it relates to parenting, although the definition often reflects the role of the mother rather than the father. Buri, Kirchner, and Walsh (1987) defined nurturance as those behaviors that provide physical or

psychological nourishment. They further describe successful nurturing behaviors as being appropriately responsive to the emotional needs, personal rhythms, and developmental stages of the child. Mackey (1996) defined nurturance as a subset of interconnectedness or attachment behavior; as providing physical or psychological nourishment. Nurturance is also defined as the warmth and acceptance a child receives from her parents, which is different than involvement; involvement relates to the participation in various aspects of children's lives (Finley et al., 2008). Locke and Prinz (2002) describe nurturance as different than discipline as well. When parents nurture they are providing a positive environment for the parent-child relationship and the child's emotional development, whereas discipline is focused on specific outcomes. Locke and Prinz (2002) suggest that the research literature focuses on two facets of nurturance: emotional expressions (e.g. hugs, verbal statements of love, communication of acceptance) and instrumental acts (e.g. playing a game together, doing a favor, helping) (p. 898). Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) described a nurturing parent as one who is sensitive to their children's emotional needs, communicates well with their children, is supportive in times of stress, and is knowledgeable and interested in their children's activities. Nurturing behaviors have also been operationalized as "touching, carrying, hugging, kissing, other contact, talking, and feeding" and summarized as "an aggregate of physical affection, verbal affection, teaching a skill, and playing" (Flannery Quinn, 2009, p. 142). Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) characterized nurturing actions as waking with child at night, taking child to the doctor, staying home when child is sick, and soothing when upset, as opposed to simply washing the child, taking for a walk, dressing, or taking along on an errand. Essentially, nurturing implies engagement.

Doucet (2006) writes that nurturing reflects connection between the parent and child and knowing intuitively what a child wants and needs. Based on narrative research, Doucet identifies nurturing behaviors that are more specific to fathers than mothers (while arguing against gendered care). She writes that fathers tend to nurture through fun and playfulness, physical activity, problem-solving, and promoting risk-taking and independence. Although on the surface some might find these last two decidedly un-nurturing in that they appear to focus on letting go rather than connecting, Doucet found that such activities do reflect the nurturing qualities of attentiveness, responsiveness, and competence.

Pruett (1993) also reported that fathering consists of characteristics that are unique to fathers. For example, Pruett reported on a 1974 study that found that fathers tend to encourage curiosity, to support problem solving, and to encourage both intellectual and physical challenges.

### **Obstacles to Nurturing for Fathers**

Mothers benefit from the “motherhood mystique,” a belief that mothers are more central and competent in child care and children's well-being (Huffnung, 1989, as cited in Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997, p. 203), whereas fathers have to struggle with the popular misconception of “toxic parent” syndrome (Tremblay & L'Heureux, 2005). Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) found that fathers were making efforts to transform their role from the more traditional emotionally distant father to that of an emotionally responsive and involved father. On the other hand, Levant and Wimer (2010) found that many men have been resistant to a new definition of fathering. Levant and Wimer found this resistance to be partially related to the traditional roles society assigned to fathers

(provider/supporter/disciplinarian) as well as male socialization. Increasingly men are experiencing conflict and contradiction between the roles they learned and the new roles that are expected of them, especially as it relates to nurturing (Oren, Englar-Carlson, Stevens, & Oren, 2010).

There are numerous “rules” around how men should behave—for example “the sturdy oak”—that discourage men from showing weakness, particularly emotion (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Levant & Wimer, 2010, p. 10; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002, p. 362). Because emotion is closely tied to nurturing, adhering to the sturdy oak or other societal expectations of masculinity can create discord in fathers who also desire to nurture their children. Doucet (2006) writes that fathers frequently exhibit more traditionally masculine care giving qualities because they were socialized that way as children. She found that men are “marked by hegemonic masculinity” and that they frequently distance themselves from the feminine (p. 118). In Doucet’s narrative study, men also expressed concern about the “social taboos around men and physical touching, both with boys and girls in the preteen and teen years” (p. 118). Discomfort with touch limits many of the traditional nurturing behaviors previously identified.

#### Fathering Post-Divorce and Emotional Well-Being

Self-identity and well-being are discussed in the literature as being interconnected. It has been suggested that “life events related to identities are more likely to produce distress than other life events” (Thoits, 1991, as cited in Burke, 1991, p. 836). At the same time, role confusion has been identified as a contributing factor to distress (Stone, 2001).



Being a father has been found to positively contribute to the development of emotional skills, possibly helping men manage what are often negative responses to emotional stress, responses such as anger, avoidance, and lack of communication (Dowd, 2000). When families separate, for example due to divorce, fathers must take on a new role as a “single” father. Family-based identity transitions are increasingly complex, and often result in fathers trying to make sense of their parenting roles in comparison to expectations of the ideal image of fathering (Marsiglio, Day, et al., 2000).

There are many areas where life post-divorce can be problematic for men, including daily living, interpersonal relationships with former spouse and children, and self-concept and identity (Stone, 2001). Therefore, a change in a father’s role or identity as the result of divorce is just one of many possible emotional stressors that men can face. Both residential and non-residential fathers can feel confused or apprehensive about their fathering role, however a connection between fathers’ custodial status and emotional well-being has been found with role confusion serving as a contributing factor to the psychological distress fathers feel post-divorce (Bokker, Farley, & Bailey, 2006). Divorced fathers often struggle when their role is suddenly converted to one of “visitation” and can be at risk for long-term emotional distress (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Silverstein, 2002). It is possible however that fathers, perhaps in an effort to minimize stress, have begun to define and clarify the fathering post-divorce role as was found by Silverstein and Auerbach (1999).

Loss of their role as father, characterized by limited time and exposure to their children, was found to be the most stress-inducing situation divorced fathers face (Guttman, 1989). Evidence exists that loss of contact with their children post-divorce is

even more significant for noncustodial fathers (Wall & Levy, 1994). Guttman also argued that being a non-custodial parent is psychologically more risky than being a custodial parent. Divorced fathers often express that they feel "demeaned, demoralized, lost, and unsupported," with non-custodial fathers also facing guilt and "severe anhedonia" (Spector, 2006, p. 870). Non-custodial fathers whose access or contact with their children is limited can suffer from anxiety, depression, and stress-related illnesses; they can express that they feel overwhelmed (Dreyfus, 1979; Wall & Levy, 1994). Divorced fathers also express difficulty in understanding their children and have a tendency towards substance abuse (Guttman, 1989).

Early research on clinical interventions from the 1950s focused on the traditional role of fathers as providers and disciplinarians, but not specifically divorced fathers. The recommendation at the time for working with men was that mental health workers engage men in counseling groups, with a particular emphasis on reestablishing self-esteem. Fathers were more inclined to engage in therapy if their children had emotional problems and so there is considerable literature from the late 1960s and early 1970s about the value of including fathers (who were typically the non-custodial parent and who had often been left out) in the therapy of children post-divorce, something that previously had not been done (Levant & Wimer, 2010; Tremblay & L'Heureux, 2005). However, the emphasis was primarily on the needs and well-being of the children, not the needs of the divorced father. Until the late 1970s, very little was written about working with fathers on their own, let alone with divorced fathers. In 1989, Guttman wrote that research into the difficulties divorced fathers face as both a person and a parent had "hardly been touched upon" (Guttman, 1989, p. 247).

Stone (2001) set out to test a theoretical model of fathers' psychological well-being following divorce. Not unlike other researchers, Stone made reference to the fact that there was limited attention paid to fathers post-divorce. Stone investigated numerous hypotheses related to role ambiguity, role satisfaction, and support and encouragement. Specifically Stone investigated the relationship between role ambiguity and lack of role clarity and an increase in post-divorce psychological distress for fathers; he also considered whether role satisfaction might be an integral component of fathers' well-being post-divorce. Finally, Stone looked at whether or not fathers who received more support and encouragement for their role as a father post-divorce experience less psychological distress. As a result, Stone concluded that role of fathering post-divorce is complex.

#### Problems or Tensions in the Field

In 1996, Dudley suggested that new insights into how to involve fathers in parenting could be gained by focusing research on non-custodial fathers, because previously they had been largely left out of the research "mix." Marsiglio, Amato, et al. (2000) identified a growing need to address diversity in future research on fathering. They wrote about scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and future directions. They focused on four key ways in which researchers were looking at fatherhood: cultural representation, the diversity of forms, relationships and developmental outcomes, and father identity. Lamb (2000) also concluded that fathering research until the new century had been too narrow and that greater attention needed to be directed toward a broader and more complete understanding of fatherhood and father involvement, including moving

beyond the breadwinner role and assessing the quality of fathers' relationships with their children.

As noted by Stone (2001) research on well-being following divorce has historically been focused on children and mothers, while issues facing fathers has been received only limited attention. Fathering researchers have also noted that much of the research *on fathering* is actually “mother centric” based on mother reports, or what is known as a “mother bias” (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Andrews et al., 2004; Bronte-Tinkew, et al., 2006; Cabrera et al., 2004; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Silverstein, 2002). Until the last 10 to 15 years, fathering was largely studied from a deficit perspective, i.e., the “lost father,” the “dead-beat dad.”

While we understand the importance of father involvement to the healthy development of children, less is known about the importance of fathering to a father—especially from the father's perspective. In writing on fathering scholarship, Marsiglio, Amato, et al. (2000) focused on studies that assessed the relationship of fathering to children's development. Little mention was made of the need to study the impact of fathering on men themselves except for a single sentence under *Future Directions*, which stated “... researchers must examine more closely ... how fathering affects men's individual development” (Marsiglio, Amato, et al., 2000, p. 1185). An overview of the literature on the effects of divorce on fathers and children by Jacobs (1982) pointed to the fact that fathers are often left out of the post-divorce equation. The overview reflected that fathers at that time were most concerned over the prospect of losing their children and that a pervasive sense of loss created one of the most significant obstacles to post-divorce adjustment. He also found that divorced men were vulnerable to psychiatric

illness, as well as depression, anxiety, sense of loss, and apathy. Jacobs noted that “the psychiatric literature rarely concerns itself with what is best for the father, nor does it link the father’s well-being with the ultimate well-being of his children” (1982, p. 183). An extensive literature review by Dudley (1996) found that there is little in the literature on the needs of the non-custodial father.

Dudley (1996) also reported that only five qualitative studies were found that focused on the views of non-custodial fathers. Numerous other researchers have expressed a need for qualitative research on fathers’ voices and experiences (Andrews et al., 2004; Cabrera, et al., 2004; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, et al. 1999; Forste et al., 2009; Gadsen et al., 2004; Madden-Derdich, & Leonard, 2000; Stone, 2001).

### Conclusion

The literature reveals that although there is a long history of studying fathers and fatherhood, only in recent years has the focus shifted to consider the fathers themselves. Fathers are being viewed as increasingly more expressive, more intimate, and more involved in the day-to-day care of their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2009). Fathers are now expected not only to be the provider and disciplinarian, but to be involved with their children, to be nurturing of both their children and their spouse, to be the provider of moral and ethical guidelines, to be an educator, and to serve as role models for their children (Oren, Englar-Carlson et al., 2010). Despite shifts in society's expectations of the father role, a new role has not been universally adopted (Dowd, 2000; Levant & Wimer, 2010), with the role of the divorced, non-custodial father particularly unclear (Guttman, 1989). However, it is generally recognized that change in the fathering role needs to occur and that fathers need to become more “deeply involved” in raising their children

(Levant & Wimer, 2010). Society needs to move beyond fathers being viewed as simply instrumental in their children's lives, they need to be viewed as expressive participants as well (Levant & Wimer, 2010).

Fatherhood research has found that there is no clear model for fatherhood and that “men are still creating and constructing something ‘new,’ a role different from that of their fathers and grandfathers, but one that is ambiguous and unstable” (Dowd, 2000, p. 41). To compound the issue, society may not yet be on the same page as fathers with regard to the societal or cultural definition of that role. Despite high public visibility, there is no single definition for the fathering role. And although contemporary society supports men engaging in an active, nurturing father “role,” many men still feel tremendous pressure to fulfill the three Ps of provider, protector, and procreator (Andronico & Horne, 2004).

Fathering continues to evolve in our culture; for the individual father, the role is also fluid, changing as the father and the child change and develop. This lack of clarity can be the cause of confusion and distress for fathers, feelings that are often exacerbated by divorce as the role of the divorced father is even less understood than that of the father in general. It is increasingly important for researchers to understand how the role is defined, negotiated, and expressed, particularly in periods of transition.

### III – METHODOLOGY

The methodology and procedures that were used to conduct this study are described in this chapter, including the proposed approach, research design and propositions, the rationale for selecting the approach and an evaluation of its validity for conducting this research, the researcher's perspective, and the data collection and analysis.

#### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to use a phenomenological approach to develop a deeper, richer understanding of divorced fathers' nurturing experience from their perspective. Using interviews, I explored with fathers, in their own words, their experiences of nurturing their children post-divorce.

#### Methodological Approach

This was a qualitative study because it was grounded in the lived experiences of fathers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experience. It is the life-world as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings that is the object of the study. (Schwandt, 2001, as cited in Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138)

Qualitative research is characterized by its inductive and emerging qualities—it is a “from the ground up” undertaking. Qualitative research is also shaped by the researcher's own experience as data is collected and analyzed (Creswell, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (1999) described qualitative research as naturalistic and employing methods that respect the participants' humanity. Qualitative research is emergent, evolving, and

interpretive. Researchers hold a holistic view of the social worlds they are investigating. They also systematically reflect on their own role in the research and how their own stories can shape the study. Finally, qualitative researchers employ “complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deduction and induction” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2).

### Rational and Evidence for the Selected Methodology

Certain aspects of fathering have been the subject of considerable research over the years. Much of the research on fathering has been quantitative, focused on “family work,” and time-use oriented (i.e., do they pay child support, how much time do they spend playing with, teaching, caring for their children) (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hallman et al., 2007). Researchers have created many ways to measure father involvement, although frequently what is measured is family work (quantitative) rather than the father-child relationship (qualitative). Researchers have also developed tools and assessments to measure fathers’ well-being. Bokker et al. (2006) used assessments and scales to measure emotional well-being relative to custodial status; Stone (2001) investigated post-divorce father well-being with various depression and anxiety scales and assessments.

Numerous researchers have expressed a need for more qualitative research in fathering scholarship. Marsiglio, Amato, et al. (2000) suggested in-depth qualitative interviews might contribute to a richer understanding of “how fathers construct and negotiate their self-images as fathers ...” (p. 1179). Dudley (1996) also found that there was value in the expressed views of noncustodial fathers that was based on “firsthand, naturalistic data” that was not “necessarily bound by previous explanations of a phenomenon” (p. 412). My interest lies with the experience of fathers nurturing their



children post-divorce, “measured” through the voices of fathers; therefore, qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study.

### Research Design and “Propositions”

Qualitative methodologies are characterized as “inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experiencing in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). In conceptualizing this research project, I made certain philosophical and paradigmatic assumptions prior to initiating their research (Creswell, 2007; Fassinger, 2005). As a researcher, I believe that reality is “subjective and multiple” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17) and that the research process is a collaborative one between the researcher and the participants; thus the use of a phenomenological approach that employed one-on-one interviews to draw on the reality of individual fathers. The use of interviews allowed me to “get as close as possible” to the research subjects so that what is known is known firsthand (Creswell, 2007, p. 18).

My world view or paradigm further shaped the research (Creswell, 2007). As an interpretivist, not a positivist, I do not accept that the scientific method is the only way to learn about the world, or that one must use the same research methods in the social sciences that are used in the natural sciences. As an interpretivist, I am focused on “local understanding”; in this case, the experiences of individual fathers, rather than on generalizable truths and laws, such as a theory of fathering post-divorce (Willis, 2007).

For this study, it was more important to understand a particular situation or context—individual fathers nurturing their children post-divorce—than to discover universal laws or rules (Willis, 2007). In this study, the behavior under investigation was nurturing, specifically the experience of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce. As

discussed in the literature review, roles/identities are socially constructed and therefore a social constructivist perspective was also appropriate for this research, which will be essentially a socially constructed activity with the intent of making meaning from the social process of fathers nurturing.

### Evaluation of the Quality/Validity of the Approach

Qualitative research is an emergent undertaking as well as an iterative one. Willis describes the qualitative research process as one that "... does not typically use planned research methods that cannot be changed once the study has begun ... Instead, the methods emerge across the research project" (Willis, 2007, p. 111).

A phenomenological approach is best suited to research problems that are oriented towards lived experience and from which the researcher desires to understand the common or shared experience of several participants around a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Van Manen wrote that the purpose of phenomenology is to reduce the individual experiences to a description of a universal essence (Creswell, 2007). Meaning questions employed in phenomenology can result in a better or deeper understanding of the phenomena (van Manen, 2009). Willig (2008) describes phenomenology as interested in "the world as it is experienced by human beings within particular contexts and at particular times, rather than in abstract statements about the nature of the world in general" (p. 52).

### **Background on Phenomenology**

The origin of phenomenology is rooted in philosophy; it is an approach to studying experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Different philosophers over the years have influenced the development of phenomenology as a method of inquiry.

Husserl, for example, believed that phenomenology should focus on capturing “the essence” (Smith, et al., 2009). Husserl pursued this essence using a method that employed three distinct phases of contemplation: epoch, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative reduction (Willig, 2008). Husserl’s approach, however, was focused more on exploring his own experience than analyzing the experience of others (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger, a student of Husserl, pursued phenomenology from a hermeneutical perspective, or the belief that interpretation is central to phenomenological inquiry (Smith, et al., 2009). The German philosopher Hegel believed that phenomenology referred to “knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Sartre introduced the concept of absence to phenomenology, in other words “things that are absent are as important as those that are present in defining who we are and how we see the world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19).

Some tension existed amongst the early practitioners of phenomenology around the issue of descriptive versus interpretative phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology (Husserl, for example) strives for phenomenological purity [transcendental], where description is primary and interpretation is actually a type of description (Willig, 2008). Descriptive phenomenology employs the epoche, where one’s preconceived ideas and conceptions are set aside or suspended so that they do not obstruct understanding of the phenomenon (Willig, 2008). Conversely, interpretive phenomenology does not separate description and interpretation; interpretive phenomenology is hermeneutic, adhering to the belief that description is a form of interpretation (van Manen, for example). Interpretive phenomenology is more circular in

that parts are understood from the whole, but the whole is also understood from the parts (Willig, 2008).

Husserl's traditional approach, again, consisted of three components: epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Willig, 2008). Epoche is where the researcher suspends "presuppositions and assumptions, judgments and interpretations" in order to be fully aware of the phenomenon (Willig, 2008, p. 53). Phenomenological reduction is where the phenomenon is described, both the physical features as well as the experiential elements; this is the texture. Finally, imaginative variation is where the "how" of the phenomenon is explored; the phenomenon's structure, without which "it would not be what it is" (Willig, 2008, p. 53). The texture and structure combined are the essence.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

At the outset my intent was to use a phenomenological approach. As I became more immersed in the project, my approach was refined. I drew upon a relatively new process used frequently in psychological research known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, or IPA. Not unlike other phenomenological approaches, IPA explores personal lived experience and is concerned with how participants make sense of their lives. IPA also recognizes, however, the central role of the researcher as she tries to make sense of the participants' experience as well. This is referred to as a "double hermeneutic"; hermeneutics being a method of interpretation (Smith, 2004).

Since the late 50s, phenomenology has been moving away from the purely philosophical (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) write that the philosophical literature on phenomenology can be difficult to digest and often strays from

the fact that phenomenology is about everyday experiences. Increasingly, researchers within the field of psychology are employing an approach known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which examines how people make sense of their major life experiences expressed “in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems” (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 32). When something important has happened in our lives, our lives take on a special significance; IPA researchers are interested in understanding what this means to those who are experiencing the particular phenomena (in this study, the phenomena of nurturing post-divorce) (Smith, et al., 2009).

Practitioners of IPA recognize that truly suspending one’s presuppositions, assumptions, and judgments is nearly impossible (Willig, 2008). IPA is more hermeneutic; it is more descriptive. IPA was the form of phenomenological analysis that was used in this study.

### **Validity of the Approach**

Something is valid when it is both relevant and meaningful. A researcher’s philosophical and paradigmatic assumptions can be directly related to both the validity and the efficacy of the approach we choose (Creswell, 2007; Fassinger, 2005). Two of these assumptions—ontology and epistemology—relate to a researcher’s stance on the nature of reality and how we know what we know, respectively. Interpretative qualitative methods allow the researcher to enter the world of the research participant (Charmaz, 2006); IPA allowed me to get as close as possible to the research participants and to hear first hand of their experiences. Doing so drew upon my skills as a counselor and my ability to develop rapport. By using a phenomenological approach, I was able to explore multiple participants’ experiences with the particular phenomenon. The data I collected and the analysis I conducted was also shaped by the experiences that I share with the

participants; therefore, this research relied on collaborative experiences to bring meaning to the experience of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce (Charmaz, 2006; Smith, 2009).

### Data Collection, Analysis, and Form of Results

Generally when employing a phenomenological approach, researchers will identify a phenomenon, develop the research questions, and collect data (usually through interviews but not always) from participants who have experienced the phenomenon. Once data has been collected and “analyzed,” the researcher develops a description that is a composite of the participants’ experiences; the “essence” of the experiences (Creswell, 2007).

This study focused on the phenomenon of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce. I chose to focus on nurturing because as noted in Chapter 2, nurturing requires engagement and divorced fathers have fewer opportunities to engage with their children due to shared or restricted post-divorce parenting.

### **Study Population**

The population for this study was divorced fathers in a western state. Divorced fathers (biological or adoptive) are those fathers who were previously married to their children’s mother, who lived as a part of an intact family, who were residential, and whose continuing relationship with their children has been constrained in some way by (i.e., shared custody, supervised visitation). Fathers who have full physical custody of their children post-divorce as awarded by the court were not included in this study.

For this study, the fathers were to have come from intact heterosexual families. Fathers who are homosexual could participate in this study so long as they were in a

heterosexual marriage prior to divorce; one gay father participated in this study. Fathers in domestic partnerships without marriage were not interviewed. This is not to say that these fathers might not make a significant contribution. However, the institutional and legal frameworks of these partnerships are different than for divorced fathers and form another avenue of inquiry.

Fathers could be any age, race, socio-economic status, or educational status. Participants completed a brief demographic survey where questions were asked on age, number of children, years married, years divorced, time spent with children, and so forth, however, the responses were not analyzed using statistics. Details on the fathers' demographic make-up are summarized in Chapter 4.

### **Sample**

Most important to participant sampling in a phenomenological research project is that the research participant has actually experienced the phenomenon being studied and is willing to participate in lengthy interview. That the participant is also interested in the nature of the phenomenon and its meaning would be of value as well (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

My intent was to interview up to 12 divorced fathers whose parenting time has been reduced, limited, or constrained; in the end I interviewed seven fathers. Participants did not need to be of any particular socio-economic status, ethnicity, education, or other demographic factors. Participants were sought via referrals from mental health professionals who work with this population, postings to websites (i.e. Craigslist) and social networking sites (i.e. Facebook), and through word-of-mouth. Although in some ways this represented a “snowball” sampling technique, the sample was also purposeful,

in other words, it was not “left to chance.” In essence the participants needed to have (a) experienced the phenomenon and (b) possessed the ability to “adequately reflect on their experience and verbally describe it” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). The participants provided “information-rich cases for study,” which created the depth necessary for a qualitative study (Polkinghorne, 2005).

### **Data Collection**

The data consisted of individual narratives by fathers who have experienced the phenomenon of nurturing their children post-divorce. Data collection consisted of an interview with each participant. Initially it was anticipated that there would be two interviews, with the second interview be conducted to clarify, deepen, or expand the narratives. The first interviews went well, there was considerable back and forth with the participants, and I was able to probe for deeper responses when appropriate. As a result, I chose not to conduct full second interviews. This decision was based on my “gut” intuition that “opening the door” to their divorce experiences once was sufficient for these fathers. One father specifically stated that his sister had cautioned him against participating because he had finally “gotten over” his divorce. Another potential participant initially agreed to participate, then withdrew after thinking about it for a day or two, stating that he, too, had only recently “gotten over” the bad feelings and did not want to re-open those wounds.

The interview questions used to elicit the participants’ experiences of nurturing their children post-divorce were based on the definitions and descriptions of nurturing as found in the literature (see Chapter 2). The semi-structured interviews were based on the following questions.



1. How would you describe your relationship with your children post-divorce? (Probes might include: What do you do with your children on weekdays? Weekends? Describe your family meals? Do you attend school events? Sporting events? What might a typical parenting time look like?)
  - Describe how you respond to your children's emotional needs?
  - Describe how you support your children during difficult periods/periods of stress?
  - Describe how you care for your children when they are ill/injured.
  - Describe your knowledge of and interest in your children's activities.
  - Describe your involvement in your children's activities.
2. How is this similar/different than when you were married/living with your family?
3. Do you believe you are more, the same, or less nurturing with your children since your divorce?
4. Describe how you feel about nurturing your children post-divorce? What adjectives would you use to describe your experience? Is there a metaphor that captures your experience?

The digitally recorded interviews were downloaded and transcribed to create the transcripts. Additional data memos were generated throughout the process documenting my thoughts and ideas on concepts, procedures, and analysis in order to capture my "...evolving ideas, assumptions, hunches, uncertainties, insights, feelings, and choices..." during the research process (Fassinger, 2005, 163). Researchers use memos to help them to think about the data, discover ideas about the data, help in data analysis, capture comparisons and connections, to bring clarity to questions, and to help focus on what directions to pursue (Charmaz, 2006).

## **Data Analysis**

Nurturing was described in Chapter 2 based on various representations in the literature. The interview questions were then developed to reflect that description of nurturing. My intent was not to define or redefine nurturing, it was to extract from these fathers their experiences of engaging in activities that are associated with nurturing in a post-divorce context.

There is no one proscribed approach for conducting IPA. Smith et al. (2009) describe three levels of interpretation that they say are consonant with IPA: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. This analysis was a hybrid approach, drawing from both the traditional phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation and IPA. IPA consists of several levels of interpretation. The first level relies more on description and less on interpretation or deeper psychological analysis. The second focuses on the linguistic qualities of the transcripts. The third level is the conceptual level; this is the more interpretative process. This study employed the first and third levels (Smith, et al., 2009).

The first stage of analysis came during the interviews and the subsequent transcription of the interviews. During the interviews I noted major ideas, initial thoughts, observations, associations, questions, summary statements, and descriptive labels that came to mind as the participant was interviewed (Willig, 2008, p. 58). Sometimes those notes became further questions for the participant, sometimes they became questions for future participants, and sometimes they were simply ideas about the topic that came to mind. As I transcribed my interviews, verbatim (Smith et al., 2009), I had the opportunity to “re-live” the exchange. As things came to mind during the transcription process, I made notes in the actual transcripts, often using brackets or highlighting.

The second phase of analysis consisted of reading, and reading again, the full transcripts. A coding book (Saldana, 2009) was created where the labels and a brief description of the codes, as I saw them, were recorded (Appendix A). Using data processing, the original transcripts were re-organized based on the initial codes; extraneous text was deleted, resulting in an abbreviated transcript. From this process, more consolidated codes from the initial codes were identified and labeled.

Third, I began to apply “structure” to the data; evaluating the codes in relation to each other in terms of natural clusters, shared meanings or references, and hierarchical relationships (Willig, 2008, p. 58). Out of these related codes arose the themes. Specifically, electronic files were created for each of the themes, consolidating the data from each participant under that theme; a table of “recurrent themes” by participant (Appendix B) was also created (Smith et al., 2009, p. 107). Also at this point, I began to think of the themes in terms of the imaginative variation and phenomenological reduction previously discussed: In other words, the how and the what.

The results of the research took the form of a rich description of the participants’ experience (both structural and textual) as well as a composite description of the experience that captured the “experience” of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce (Creswell, 2007).

### Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research often relies on trustworthiness, audit trails, member checks, and peer review to establish reliability and validity. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002), however, argue that over the past 20 years qualitative researchers have moved away from rigor *during* the research process, replacing it with “criteria and

standards for evaluation of the overall significance, relevance, impact, and utility of completed research” (p. 14). Morse et al. (2002) consider qualitative research to be iterative rather than linear and that the analytical expectation of qualitative research is that it is self-correcting. The authors recommend five verification strategies; I adhered to four of the five strategies as described below:

1. *Strategy—Methodological coherence, or ensuring congruence between the research questions and the method.* The research question—How do fathers experience their role as a nurturing parent post-divorce?—was selected to gain insight into a particular phenomenon, fathers nurturing post-divorce, and thus was true to a phenomenological approach. The interview questions supported the research question, focusing on the lived experience of the participants.
2. *Strategy—Appropriate sampling, or ensuring that the participants best represent or have knowledge of the phenomenon.* The sampling, which was both snowball and purposeful, was appropriate. The resulting participants had both experienced the phenomenon and possessed the ability to reflect on and articulate that experience.
3. *Strategy—Collecting and analyzing data concurrently, so that there is a mutual interaction between what is known and what needs to be known.* The data collection and analysis occurred concurrently. As soon as an interview with one participant was completed it was transcribed. The second “hearing” of the interview often influenced the subsequent interviews. More than once, questions or probes emerged from a transcript that were employed in subsequent interviews.

4. *Strategy—Thinking theoretically, where ideas that emerge from the data are confirmed by new data, generating new ideas, that are then confirmed by the existing data.* Morse et al. (2002) suggest that qualitative researchers “move back and forth” to “ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis” (p. 17). These activities should occur continuously during the research project to achieve reliability and validity and ensure rigor. The process of this research was iterative in that data would emerge from one interview, which could then be confirmed by data that would arise in a subsequent interview, which then would result in new ideas that were confirmed by returning to the literature and reviewing existing data. It was also in this manner that many of the initial codes and subsequent themes of analysis were created.

5. *Strategy—Theory development, where the researcher moves between the “micro” perspective of the data and the macro perspective of conceptual understanding.*

Because I used a phenomenological approach, rather than grounded theory, the findings were a description of the participants’ lived experiences rather than a conceptual or theoretical understanding of fathers nurturing their children post divorce.

Participants were also sent copies of their transcripts to review. Most responded with “no comment”; a few did not respond at all. A copy of the draft findings (Chapters 4 & 5) were sent to the participants as well. One participant responded; he stated that

reading the findings had made him cry. As indicated previously, this topic had the potential to “dredge up” memories and emotions that many would rather leave buried. Therefore, I did not vigorously pursue additional input from the participants past the first interview.

## IV – FINDINGS

*I know that I have a really strong responsibility to make sure that she knows that I'm in her life and that I'm available to her emotionally. I think that's my biggest job in my life.*

*Divorced father*

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce. What was found, in general, is that the fathers interviewed in this study continued to engage/nurture/be there for their children at levels similar to, or in many cases exceeding, their pre-divorce relationships, despite numerous obstacles. Two general observations emerged from these fathers' stories: that the "loss" of their children through divorce brought home just how precious that relationship was, and that often times their relationship with their children was enhanced post-divorce.

Because there was only the one research question—How do fathers experience their role as a nurturing parent post divorce?—the findings are organized around the interview questions. The interview questions yielded data, in the form of transcripts, which were then reduced to codes and further to themes as described later in this chapter. The interview questions were developed based on the descriptions and definitions of nurturing as found in the literature. In general, nurturing has been described as positive engagement, warmth, accessibility, and responsibility.

## The Participants

The experiences of this relatively small sample of participants ( $N=7$ ) still highlighted the diversity of marriage and divorce today. Participants ranged in age from 33 to 55; the age of participants when they married ranged from 24 to 39. The number of years they were married ranged from 2.5 to 19 (which does not reflect a 10-year common law marriage); the period of time participants were divorced, prior to the research interview, ranged from four months to 16 years.

One participant technically did not meet the “divorced” criteria required for participation in the study as he has been separated from his daughter’s mother for eight years, but not divorced. I elected to interview and include the father in the study as he is a father of color and I felt the additional “voice” was important to this research.

Finding participants who were fathers of color was difficult. Although several attempts were made via personal and professional relationships, only one father of color participated in the study. Therefore, the study consisted of six White and one Black participant; one father was Gay.

Between them, the participants had a total of 15 biological children, with current ages ranging from 3 to 19 years; the children’s ages at the time of divorce ranged from 2.5 to 17 years. Seven of the children were born before the marriages, one was conceived before and born during, and the remaining seven were born during the marriages.

Parenting time was highly variable as well. All of the participants experienced a period of time where they did not have 100% parental responsibility for, or access to, their children (thus qualifying them to participate in the study); most still do not have 100% responsibility or access. Two participants currently have nearly 100% parental



responsibility. In one case, it is a de facto 100% as his children have lived with him full-time since about two years after the divorce. They still live with him full-time while attending college and make very little effort to spend time with their mother (and vice versa). In the other case, the participant's parenting time has evolved over the course of nine years from none (he was incarcerated), to supervised parenting for nearly five years, to every-other-weekend, to primary custody.

Time the participants spend with their children, and the amount of contact they have with their children, varied widely as well. Parenting time ranged from "24/7" to "72-hours a month." Most of the participants had open or unlimited access to their children during periods of separation, primarily by phone, except for one who indicated that he was limited to two hours of phone communication per month.

The character of the participants' divorces varied as well. Two of the seven participants had what could be called "high conflict" divorces, two had what could be described as "basically cooperative," two participants had what could be characterized as "cooperative/amiable," and the last participant, as noted, is not technically divorced but has been separated for eight years. His separation could be characterized as "amiable."

Following are brief descriptions of each participant and their parenting time. Pseudonyms have been used for confidentiality.

**Bobby.** Bobby is a 48-year old divorced father with one daughter who is 8. Bobby has been divorced longer than he was married and currently sees his daughter on an every-other-weekend schedule. He used to have Wednesday evenings as well, however, the distance between his and his ex-wife's homes made the mid-week visit a hardship on all involved, particularly his daughter. I have characterized Bobby's divorce as "basically

cooperative.” My sense from the interview was that Bobby might not have wanted the divorce to occur, although he did not say this directly. Although Bobby has had numerous relationships since the divorce, he has not remarried, and currently considers his daughter the most significant “relationship” in his life. Bobby speaks on the phone to his daughter, by his account, about two hours a month.

**Bryce.** Bryce is a 49-year old divorced father with one son who is 16. Bryce’s divorce can be characterized as high conflict and involved many of the more dramatic issues seen in divorces today—allegations of domestic violence, protective orders, incarceration, supervised parenting, and on-going bitterness between the parties. Bryce did not see his son for about six months after being jailed on a protective order violation. He subsequently spent about five years seeing his son only at a supervised parenting facility. Eventually, Bryce was able to move out of supervised parenting and his parenting time has shifted dramatically since then; he was awarded primary custody of his son about nine months ago after his son’s mother moved away from Denver. His son now lives with him and visits his mother every-other-weekend. Bryce has not re-married and currently considers himself “dating.”

**Chase.** Chase is a 36-year old father of a 12-year old daughter. He and his former wife have been separated for almost eight years and maintain a cordial and cooperative relationship with regard to parenting their daughter. He also has a 5-year old son from a subsequent relationship who has been diagnosed with Autism; Chase’s interview for this research focuses on his relationship with his daughter from his marriage, who he sees every weekend as well as during the week as time/schedules permit. Chase also has unlimited/unrestricted phone time with his daughter.

**Jason.** Jason is a 55-year old divorced father of one daughter and two sons. (His daughter, of whom he had sole-custody, was from his first marriage and their relationship was not discussed in the interview.) Jason has been divorced from his sons' mother for 16 years. His divorce could be described as basically cooperative during the divorce process (she "gave him everything" including the children), although it became conflicted once his ex-wife remarried and demanded full-custody of the boys. The relationship has since come full circle and can be considered "cooperative/amiable" at this time. Jason initially had the children the majority of the time, with his wife having every-other-weekend and Wednesdays. Over time, the children elected to spend as little time as possible with their mother. Jason has not remarried.

**Mike.** Mike is a 33-year old divorced father with one daughter who is nine and a half. He was separated from his ex-wife for one year and has been divorced for two years. Mike's divorce could be characterized as "cooperative/amiable" and he currently has an "official" every-other-weekend schedule with his daughter, plus summers. In reality, he has much more time than the schedule permits; for example, Mike frequently attends his daughter's activities, such as ski races, on the weekends that he does not have parenting. Mike is one of two participants currently in a significant relationship; he is engaged to be married.

**Mitch.** Mitch is a 43-year old divorced father of six, three girls and three boys ranging in age from 3 to 13. Mitch and his ex-wife were in a common law marriage for 10 years before marrying; they were married for two and a half years. They have been divorced for four months. Mitch's divorce can be characterized as high conflict. Numerous allegations were made immediately following the divorce; for a period of time

Mitch had very limited access to his children as a result of these allegations. He currently has a modified every-other-weekend schedule, plus Thursday overnights, however his ex-wife is fighting the additional Thursday overnights. Mitch expressed that there was a good deal of alienation as the result of the divorce and currently the family is involved in family systems therapy in an effort to restore trust and normalcy.

**Tom.** Tom is a 48-year old divorced father of two daughters aged 18 and 15; the oldest daughter has left home to attend college. Tom and his ex-wife were married for more than 19 years and separated for six years before ultimately divorcing in 2010. Tom's divorce can be characterized as amiable; he and his ex-wife continued to live in the same house and parent their daughters after they separated. Tom and his ex-wife do not follow any particular schedule for parenting. The daughters live primarily with their mother, but spend time whenever they want with their dad; Tom bought a house a few blocks from the family home to make it easier for the girls to stay with him. He also spends time at his ex-wife's house with the girls when she is out-of-town on business and the family still celebrates most holidays together. Tom is Gay, and has been in a committed relationship with his partner for a number of years.

#### Transcription Process and Conventions

As a professional transcriptionist, I was able to transcribe my own interviews; I had the opportunity to “relive” the actual interview as I listened to the digital files for the first time. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, however, as memories were triggered during the transcription process—of tone of voice, pattern of speech, body language and facial expressions—I made notes in the actual transcripts to add depth to the typed words.

Data processing facilitated the transcript analysis. The original transcripts were re-organized based on the initial codes; extraneous text was deleted, resulting in an abbreviated transcript. Codes were evaluated in relation to each other in terms of natural clusters, shared meanings or references, and hierarchical relationships, which resulted in themes (Willig, 2008, p. 58). Electronic files were created for each of the themes, consolidating the data from each participant under that theme; a table of “recurrent themes” by participant (Table 1 & Appendix B) was also created (Smith et al., 2009, p. 107).

Table 1

*Recurrent Themes by Participant*

Theme	Participant						
	Bobby	Bryce	Chase	Jason	Mike	Mitch	Tom
Activities	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Before vs. After	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
“Bad Period”	•	•	•		•		•
Being There/Nurturing/ Engaged/ Available	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Feelings About Being a Dad	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Learning to be a Dad	•	•			•	•	•
Parenting Time	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Self-Assessment	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Stereotypes/Roles	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Emotion—Child	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Emotion—Dad	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
“Dad” Job Description	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Obstacles	•	•				•	
Teaching About Life/Not Making the Same Mistakes	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Parent “Titles”	•	•			•	•	
Thinking About Child/What’s Missing	•			•	•	•	
Relationship With Child	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Institutions/Systems	•	•		•	•	•	
Routine/Ritual	•	•		•		•	•
Listening				•	•	•	•
Recreate/Rebond		•			•	•	
Step Parents	•	•		•	•		•

## Overview of Themes

In phenomenological reduction we describe the phenomenon that presents itself to us in its totality. This includes physical features such as shape, size, colour and texture, as well as experiential features such as the thoughts and feelings that appear in our consciousness as we attend to the phenomenon. (Willig, 2008, p. 53)

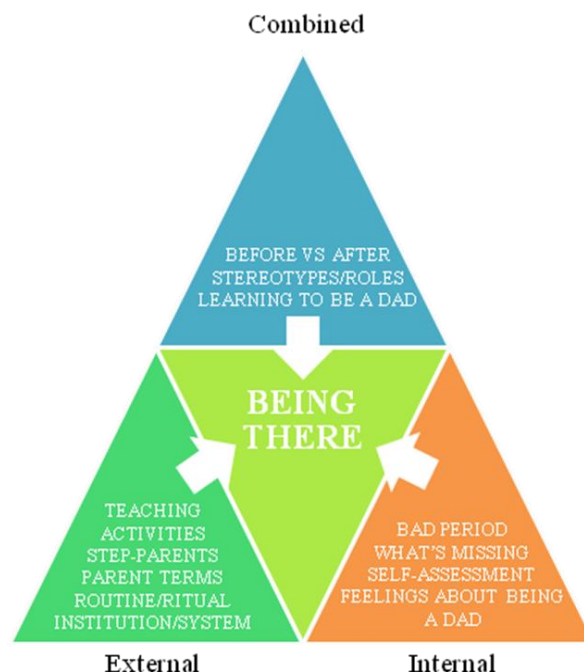
The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process is characterized as “...moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the

interpretative” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). The initial codes that emerged from the analysis and the subsequent themes of this research reflect the “particular to shared” and “descriptive to interpretative” quality of IPA. Phenomenological reduction describes the structural elements of the phenomenon: the “what.” Phenomenological reduction can include physical features as well as the thoughts and feelings associated with the phenomenon. Imaginative variation attempts to identify the conditions that without which the experience would not be what it is; to identify conditions associated with the phenomenon (Willig, 2008).

As reflected in Appendix A, each father’s description of his particular experiences were identified during the transcript analysis; these were the initial “codes.” The descriptions included both the physical or tangible elements of the experience, actual parenting time, names or labels associated with being a divorced dad, as well the father’s thoughts or feelings about nurturing as a divorced father. Subsequent transcripts were then examined for similar or shared experiences. This process moved “back and forth” between the transcripts, where I would return to earlier transcripts with codes that had emerged from later transcripts. The initial analysis focused primarily on the descriptions of each father’s experience. Subsequent analysis, once the descriptions had been synthesized into themes, was followed by a greater interpretation of the experience as described in this chapter.

The themes identified in Figure 1 emerged from the initial idiographic analysis of the individual cases and came together, or were “shared” in the subsequent cross-case examination (Table 1) (Smith, 2004, p. 41-42). Many of the themes represent a composite of the initial codes; some retained their initial code and stand alone. The themes represent

both the descriptive and interpretative components of the fathers' post-divorce experiences and provide a context within which the fathers in this study nurtured their children. To present the findings, I have chosen to label and present the data organized under the simple headings of "External," "Internal," and "Combined." A more detailed description of the headings follows. Ultimately, the themes contributed to a "single superordinate theme" (Smith, 2004, p. 42) *being there*, which I will discuss later in this chapter.



*Figure 1. Distribution of Themes*

### **External Themes**

In this section I present five external themes—teaching, activities, step-parents, routine/rituals, and institutions/systems—and provide excerpts from the participants' interviews that support these themes. It is through these themes that the external structures that shape post-divorce fathering are described. External structures reflect



experiences that include some sort of interaction between the father and institutions, activities, and people; as opposed to Internal themes, which reflect the fathers' thoughts and feelings about nurturing their children post-divorce. Sometimes these external experiences were imposed on the father. In each case, these external structures in some way influence the fathers' ability to engage positively, to provide warmth, to be accessible, and to be responsible, in other words, to be nurturing, toward their children.

**Teaching.** Each of the fathers made reference to the need/desire to “teach” their children. As defined in Chapter 1, nurturing is both a father's positive engagement as well as his taking responsibility for and with his children. Teaching could represent both the positive engagement and the “responsible” component of nurturing. Teaching in this study included practical “life skills” and emotional and moral components; teaching consisted of both “doing” and “talking.” In some cases, however, being divorced may have interfered with the fathers' ability to teach their children, whether due to lack of time, access, or other institutional constraints.

Teaching their children practical life skills was important to the participants; these fathers are not going to send their children into the world unprepared (or hungry). For many of the fathers, teaching consisted of “doing” by engaging in activities with their children. Practical skills were taught, as described by Jason and Bobby.

... they grew up knowing how to cook and how to sew and how to work on cars and how to clean their room and how to do their own laundry ...  
[Jason]

... big into teaching life skills ... it's like alright, um, do you know how to do laundry? Well no, hey, time to learn...well how do you do it? Well it's real simple, here, I'll show you how to do it, you know, you set your water, throw in your soap, throw in your clothes, set the time, okay, you know hot water for whites, cold for colors, permanent press are warm, that kind of stuff. [Bobby]

Beyond practical skills, teaching might also include “school-related” subjects. For example, Bobby described how he used the activity of cooking to teach his daughter math, science, and measurement concepts,

Cooking, baking ... things of that nature are just, which are fun, fun activities in themselves but also promote other concepts, ah, mathematics, comparison, contrast, measuring, fractions, you know, you can take two cups of the same volume but are different sizes and put half a thing of water and say which has more water in it, make her think a little bit, so okay, she'll say, that one, and it's like, are you sure? Pour the, take the bigger cup, pour it into the smaller cup, it's the same, alright it's the same volume, it just looks different, things like that. [Bobby]

What these fathers taught their children ran the gamut of regular, every-day “stuff,” to more challenging subjects—emotional growth, physical development, and sex. Teaching the more challenging subjects created opportunities for fathers to teach their children life lessons and for the fathers themselves to serve as role models.

With the more challenging subjects, the fathers taught by “talking” rather than doing. For example, Bryce talked to his son about learning to stand up for himself,

... you're a man, you're a boy, you're becoming of you know, age, you need to start voicing your wants and needs and you know, not demanding, not anything else, just conversing and saying look, dad, this is what I want, or you know this is what I'd like, how can we work this in ... I said “see how, see how that works? You need to tell me these things, you need to tell people how you feel, and why, so that they can resolve it or tell you why they're doing it” ... and help him get through that and to help learn the lessons of life that he's going to need to get through. [Bryce]

Whereas Chase talked to his daughter about her own growth and development as she moves towards her teenage years,

I just tell her the regular teenage stuff, like you know you're going to feel completely different about dad in about three years than you do now...you love me to death right now, you're not going to be able to stand me at some point, you know what I'm saying, within the next three years ... just little things like that, you know just the surface things ... [Chase]

Both Chase and Mike taught their daughters about sex and sexual development by talking, as demonstrated in the following quotes. For Chase, it was a collaborative process, he referred to his desire to have his daughter's mother involved, although during the interview he demonstrated ease and comfort with the topic,

... as far as like...birds and bees and everything, it's not that time, yet ... and I definitely want to sit down with her mom, I mean there's nothing going to be wrong with that, because my mom was a nurse and it is what it is you know and I'll give it to her straight, her mom's a nurse, but I do want her mom to be there ... she just started her menstrual cycle so I was only able to tell her a little about that, you know, but you know her mom sat her down and we talked ... we wanted to let her know ... how that worked out and what was going on and you know kind of give her a good idea of what it was and then her mom you know broke it down you know, everything you know she would need to go through as far the monthly thing, what tampons to use ... [Chase]

Mike, on the other hand, had the conversation on his own, without his daughter's mother.

Mike also expressed comfort with talking about sex and reproduction with his daughter and supplemented his talk with pictures that he drew, suggesting a desire to ensure that his explanation was clear to his daughter.

... one of my first post-separation parenting moments was we were eating dinner and she asked me if you could get pregnant when you're seven ... So I drew pictures and told her how fertilization occurs and sexual intercourse and a boy and a girl when they're grown up they get together and you know, and so she, you know, she responded by saying, "so my friend's sister did that with a boy?" And I said, "yeah," and she said, "that is disgusting," and I said, "yes, it's disgusting." [Mike]

Teaching appeared to benefit the fathers as well as the children. It was an opportunity for them to express empathy and positive emotions, to share, and to create continuity and collaboration, which further cemented the parenting bond and engagement. For example, ensuring that their children did not "make the same mistakes" as they did was important. For Bobby, this teaching was also self-reflective,

... you don't want your kid to have to go through the same dilemmas and dilemmas as you, you want to see her grow and make good decisions in her life and things of that nature, you know ... and I'm just trying to teach her to be as a person, you know, and it's again, it's as I learn about her I learn a lot about myself ... [Bobby]

Mike expressed that at times teaching life lessons and skills was difficult due to the young age of his daughter, but that it was important for his daughter's emotional well-being so he took advantage of the opportunity,

And, so that's a very difficult thing to sort of explain to a 9-year old girl, but, as long as people continue to behave the same, she's going to continue to experience pain, but I want her to figure out how to be collaborative, so I'm still working with her on that ...[Mike]

I had an opportunity to parent so there's a chance for me to teach her something, I could teach her that. If there was a chance for me to kind of help her figure out her behavior, I could help her figure out her behavior ... [Mike]

Both Jason and Tom referred to teaching one's children about life and moving them towards self-sufficiency through guidance and support,

... you can't live their life for them but if you're a parent you've got to kind of guide them ... [Jason]

I just I really felt like my job is to you know is to help those girls realize they can do anything, and I've said that to them, you can do anything any boy can do and probably better, um, and I wasn't trying to raise them to be you know burn the bra/ban the girdle or whatever you know that kind of stuff, not at all, but to be independent and self-reliant and not have to have a boy ... [Tom]

Passing on "life lessons" created positive emotions for one father, as described by Chase,

... it makes me feel good that I'm able to give them you know, just give them advice, give them some of my knowledge, to give them some of my experience, my wisdom, from what I know of life, and I know the bad things and I know the positive things, and this is how you get to the

positive things. So it makes me feel good inside you know, and I hope, I hope it sticks somewhere in their head ... (laughs) [Chase]

Whether it was to teach them how to do laundry, or to teach them about life, the responsibility to teach their children was present in these fathers' interviews. Based on the reflections of these fathers, it does not appear that being a divorced father reduced their desire to teach their children, which appears to be reflective of the positive engagement and responsibility associated with nurturing. For some fathers, teaching was generative, an opportunity to pass along life experiences and wisdom. Tom summed it up nicely when he said,

... you know, if you said to them what, what is your parent's job? They would say, it's to raise me to be a responsible adult, and I really felt like that too, I mean to teach them...[Tom]

**Activities.** This theme generated the largest volume of comments from the fathers. Each was able to recite a litany of activities that they engaged in with their children and how these activities were instrumental in creating or re-establishing bonds, creating engagement, enhancing accessibility, and demonstrating warmth. None of the fathers lacked for things to do with their children. Activities ranged from board games to baking, as is reflected in the fathers' descriptions of the activities they shared with their children.

... play board games, or 48 million games of fish, or we're going to watch movies all weekend ... last weekend we made a big ol' roaring fire in the wood stove and we just kicked back and we made banana bread and chocolate chip cookies, and watched the movies and played a lot of board games ... I drug her out on the mountain ... I dragged her all over Mary Jane and made her ski black bumps with me (laughs) at eight... [Bobby]

... some outdoor adventure, it's a hike or a bicycle ride or you know um, going to the lake, going kayaking or um, taking the ducky and going

through the flatwater section of the Colorado in Sulphur, going swimming, there's always some activity with a destination ... [Bobby]

I would get to see him ah, for four hours every Saturday, or five hours, actually five hours, so we got a good amount of time together, and it was just us playing together, it was pretty much the whole day and lunch ... this place was great, it had foosball tables, it had pool tables, it had a park, it had every toy known to mankind and we used them all ... it actually had a BBQ outside so we could BBQ lunch or we'd bring lunch or we'd have lunch delivered so it was always a meal period in that time ... I tried to, what I did was I, I always tried to create ah, um, (sigh) things that we did every time so that it was like he knew that when we got together this is what we're going to do first, continuity in our visits ... [Bryce]

Now that Bryce has primary custody of his son, and because his son is a lot older, the time they spend together is different.

... so he's not one of these people that are like, he's not like I was where it was you know baseball, football, water polo, you know everything, he has none of those interests ... he skateboards, so we both have long boards and we'll go long boarding together, ... we'll play pool or games together, he's got a girlfriend now ... so ... I gotta pick her up and drive them home ... we'll talk and we eat our meals together ... [Bryce]

Chase sees his daughter every weekend, starting on Saturdays.

... a regular Saturday's going to be we'll go, we'll probably go to the mall to shop, then we'll go see grandma, spend time out there, have a good time and then from there we'll come back and watch TV and do whatever, and then Sunday, Sunday comes we'll spend a little time, me and her and her little brother, you know, saying if we don't go over to my mom's or my dad's you know we'll spend that time and then I drop her off to go to church, so she goes to church with her mom and that's usually around one o'clock ... we go to Claire's boutique, and then there's another one, she loves the Disney store, what is that other store called ... it's one of them little girl stores ... [Chase]

Because Jason had primary custody, he was a working, full-time, single father. He credits his "government job" with the flexibility to be involved in his boys' lives.

... get 'em up for school, get 'em to school, go to work, come home, fix dinner, do their homework with them and go to bed and that's pretty much normal ... I coached lacrosse, I coached soccer, so they were in sports ... football, I coached a little bit of football with my youngest son, I coached

both of them in soccer and both of them in lacrosse, which they went through first grade through high school in lacrosse, both played varsity ... [Jason]

Mike shares a lot of his daughter's interests and therefore her activities.

... you know she's interested in art, so, you know, as a present I get her something to help teach her how to do oil paintings, and she's pretty good at it ... For example, she has a ski race this Sunday, you know, I'm going to be there, just like other dads, you know, that's what I do, she's interested in music, 'cause I play guitar um so we do that together, we'll write silly songs ... I had to teach her how to ride a bicycle ... [Mike]

Perhaps because his time with his children pre-divorce was limited due to working two jobs (to fulfill his provider role), Mitch probably had the longest and most detailed list of activities. He also had the most kids (6) so the sheer number would result in a lot of activities!

... we do homework, so on weekdays and sometimes on Fridays ah we'll sit down and spend about an hour, hour and a half doing homework where we ah, we get everything started, ah, some of the kids don't have homework but I ask them to get some quiet time, reading, while the others focus on their studies and I'll sit down with our 3-year old and our 6-year old and I'll start, you know the 3-year old loves to draw and I like to draw so she and I will sit and draw and our six-year old will read her stories and stuff like that, and that's how we pretty much spend our week days. [Mitch]

... the weekends ... we'll sleep in 8:30 you know 9:00 we like staying up later so 10:30, eleven o'clock is the weekend routine and we'll watch a show, we like our family shows so we'll fire up a couple videos that we have or DVDs or you know pay-for-view we like some of the movies that come out, so we'll have a little bit of a show time, ah, cooking up popcorn and stuff like that, the older girls like to pop the popcorn. [Mitch]

... if it's nice outside weather-wise, we try to do outside activities, so that's the first thing we like to do is just get outside when it's right, we live in a cul-de-sac so riding bikes on the street, we've got a nice greenbelt around the house so we can walk or get out on our bikes and take a walk around the neighborhood, um, if it's too cold we usually stay inside and we have a lot of games, we've got Scrabble and Bobble and you know Monopoly, the one with the credit cards, the older ones tend to

like ... we'll play games like that, ah you know, spend some time together ... [Mitch]

The one-on-one time Mitch carves out for each child (or pair of children) shows his commitment to engaging with each child.

... having one-on-one time are you know, I'll send some of the kids away and I'll spend time with you know one or two of them at a time, so usually groups of kids, our 3- and 6-year old girls, I'll pair them up, or our 8- and 10-year old daughters, I'll pair them up, or the boys, our 11- and 13-year olds, 12- and 13-year old boys, I'll pair them up and um with the boys I'll tend to do you know more like playing catch, football, stuff like that ... this last Christmas, ended up getting an X-Box so they picked out a couple games that they enjoyed so that's been kind of a family, been replacing our movie time is playing with video games, so those are some of the things that we do with our time together. [Mitch]

Mitch works very hard to engage in activities that are appropriate for the age and interest of each of his six children. While the older children's activities are a bit more traditional, primarily sports, Mitch can also get on the same level with his youngest daughters, ages 3 and 6.

... our 3-year old, she's crafty, she loves doing crafts, same with our 6-year old ... they love to draw, I love to draw so we sit, we could spend an hour easily just sitting at the kitchen table just drawing, and they, they you know, they ask me to draw a horse, I'll draw a horse, and I'll start it for them and then they'll color it in, finish and stuff ... our middle girls love crafts, so they'll, you know, bracelets and necklaces, they'll build stuff out of wood or throw stuff out of clay...yeah, those kind of things. [Mitch]

Tom has unrestricted access to his children despite the divorce. His older daughter is now in college out of state, but he continues to have a very close relationship with his younger daughter.

... [she's] very into drama, she likes the school plays and stuff so I'm always there for those, in fact I've got one this week ... you know, the church stuff, you know I take her to those, I pay for her to go on retreats whenever ... [she] played soccer quite a bit so I'd go to all her games ... [she] played soccer too and I went to every one of her practices, I would take her to all those ... I'd take her to all practices ... [she] ended up



giving up soccer anyway, so, but I did go to all of [her] soccer practices and her games, [she] I didn't go to her practices, but I would go to all of her games ... we'll take trips together, I've taken them on a cruise, um, we took you know my mom, the two girls ... [partner's] mother and grandmother and we bought everybody tickets and took them on a cruise one year. [Tom]

None of the fathers lacked in their ability to engage in activities with their children. However, it was apparent from the interviews that the fathers did not view activities as the “be all and end all” of their nurturing relationship. Bryce made reference, while still in supervised parenting, to his dissatisfaction of being reduced to a “play date” for his son; he wanted his relationship to more than that.

Activities frequently supplemented or supported other nurturing behaviors. Bobbie viewed activities as an opportunity for his daughter to “unwind” from the intensity of her time with her mother. For Mike, activities with his daughter often had an underlying purpose of teaching. Engaging in activities also allowed fathers an opportunity to be supportive of their children's interests as well as to develop shared interests between father and child. Engaging in activities with their children created opportunities for fathers to create bonds, to be present and accessible, and to demonstrate warmth towards their children; engaging in activities help facilitate the nurturing relationship between fathers and their children.

**Step-parents.** Step-parents represent an external factor that might stand between a father and his ability to nurture his children, whether that obstacle is real, or perceived. For Bobby, Bryce, Jason, and Mike, step-parents were a part of the post-divorce experience.

Often, step-parents are in a better position to engage in nurturing than the father himself, usually due to proximity. This is clearly described by Bobby,

... yeah, my ex-wife's boyfriend, whatever, you know, whatever you want to call it, significant other, or maybe it's K's step dad, it's still, you know, you know it's like they've been living together for, she's been living with step dad for longer than I was even married... you know that kind of always gets thrown back at me ... for awhile it's like K used to say, well my dad, my stepdad, I'm like, he's not your real dad or he's not, and I'm finally like I can't do that, alright you know, your pappa-do, he's a good guy ... you know he gets the one-on-one time before school and after school and they go to like Avs games and the Nuggets ... [Bobby]

While Bobby was able to acknowledge that his daughter's step-father might be a positive component of her life, it also appears that the existence of the step-father might exacerbate feelings about his own ability to be present as a parent. It also, apparently, triggers Bobby's feelings of loss that relate to the divorce. Prolonged feelings of loss or grief may impact a father's ability to be emotionally present to nurture his children.

... it sucks ... you know, it's um, well again ... divorce-wise it's like you're looking at somebody filling your shoes in a capacity and it's like I still want that... [Bobby]

Mike also views his daughter's "step"-parent (his ex-wife's significant other) as a benefit for his daughter (he views his own partner as a positive as well), although he is aware that this may not be the status quo for other blended families,

... you know her mother now has a partner, who's a very good man and very good to C. I have my partner, who's very good to C. so C. has this very stable, functional, alternative family. [Mike]

Mike's comfort with his ex-wife's partner, his daughter's blended family, and the lack of conflict between the various parents and step-parents, has made it easier for Mike to be emotionally available to his daughter.

The presence of a step-father in Bryce's case may have helped create an environment where Bryce ultimately secured almost full custody of his son,

... because she got remarried to a man that has the same problem as I do, he has two kids that he has to fight to see ... I think it opened her eyes to how badly this guy's been treated with his kids, now, he currently doesn't have but every other weekend visitation with them and his wife doesn't sometimes won't show up with the kids, so I think she got an understanding through him that parents need to be involved, yeah, shoe on a different foot ... I have a funny feeling he said, you're doing it to him as well, you're doing the exact same thing... [Bryce]

The increase in time with his son increased Bryce's accessibility and availability, and thus his opportunities to nurture.

For Jason, the step-father's presence and behavior clearly impacted his sons' relationship with their mother, and ultimately Jason's time with his sons,

She would allow T. to discipline the kids and his idea of disciplining the kids was a lot different than mine, he'd grab them by the neck, carry them up the stairs, he would slap them, I called the police on him a couple times. [Jason]

Because of the step-father's apparently inappropriate behavior towards the boys, and their mother's apparent acceptance of such behavior, Jason's sons ultimately chose to severely limit the time they spent with their mother; his older son chose to never visit her at her home again, despite the court's parenting schedule. As a result, Jason's ability to be present and his accessibility to his sons was greatly enhanced.

Tom, like Mike, has a significant other as well who has played a positive role for his daughters, so much so that Tom credits his daughters' acceptance of his partner with helping to build his own relationship with his daughters.

... they TRUST him, and I think that's helped build that relationship too, with me, 'cause if they, they look at him like their big brother and they really trust him, both of them, they will call him before they will call their mom or me sometimes ... [Tom]

Tom does have step-parent issues that come from another front, his former brother-in-law,

... well when I moved to a different house, even though I was in the same place, he really felt like well, it was his job and he was taking over, he was the head of the family now, for everybody, oh, it was, we had to have some conversations and I said you need to back off, you know, just because I don't live in that house doesn't mean that that you get to now decide how things are run, and he tried to talk to my kids, he was kind of disciplining them and I was like you know, I don't have a problem with you letting them know you're displeased with something, or whatever, when it comes to offending you, personally, but you don't get to discipline my kids, just like I'm not going to do that to yours... [Tom]

For some of the participants, step-parents seemed to have contributed positively to the fathers' ability to be physically present and thus nurture their children. Whether it was an increase in time, recognition by an ex-wife that fathers want to see their children, or serving as "bridges" between children and their fathers, there were many ways in which step-parents contributed (intentionally or unintentionally).

The presence of step-parents also seemed to have both positive and negative effects on the emotional status of fathers. Bryce, Mike, and Tom had positive feelings towards the involvement of "steps" in their children's lives, albeit for very different reasons. For Bryce, his son's step-father was (perhaps an unwittingly) an accomplice in Bryce's efforts to restore his parenting time with his son, a role for which Bryce was grateful. Mike was happy that his daughter had so much support from her blended family. And Tom was pleased that his daughters had a positive relationship with his partner, which often served to support his own relationship with his daughters. For Bobby, however, the step-father appeared to trigger his feelings of loss as well as to cause him to question his own adequacy as a father. And for Jason, the potentially abusive behavior of

his sons' step-father pushed him towards anger. How these fathers feel about the existence and involvement of step-fathers in their children's lives may ultimately affect their ability to nurture their children.

**Parenting terms.** A number of terms and phrases to describe parenting emerged during the interviews. Participants variously referred to themselves as "full-time parent" (prior to the divorce), "full-time caregiver" (prior to the divorce), "stay home mom," "Disneyland Dad" or "every-other-weekend-Disneyland Dad," "Schedule B," "solution-oriented parent," and "every-other-weekend-dad." These labels seemed to create expectations or imply cultural understandings of how a divorced father should act. These labels often imposed meanings on the fathers' post-divorce experiences.

Bobby was the most colorful in his description, describing his post-divorce parenting as "Disneyland Dad," "every-other-weekend-Dad," and "Schedule B" (referring to the legal document used to calculate child support obligations in Colorado). The first two are commonplace in our society and carry certain cultural meanings (not always positive). For example, a quick Google search on the term Disneyland Dad returned the following definition: "A biological father whom, after divorce, treats the kids like they're on the ultimate vacation every time they're in his custody, but does little to no actual parenting" (UrbanDictionary.com, n.d.). To someone who cares deeply for his child, and cares deeply about nurturing her, such a characterization is demeaning. Although he appears to use these terms with humor, it is possible that these descriptors hurt Bobby. At the very least, they appear to reflect a relationship (or lack thereof) with his daughter that is unsatisfactory and characterized by loss.

**Routine/Ritual.** The ability to create or recreate routine or rituals was important to the participants and supportive of their nurturing relationships. For the study participants, routines or rituals were instrumental in creating opportunities for positive engagement, displays of warmth, and accessibility to the children. Some participants, whose parenting was constrained early on, felt that they needed to rebuild or recreate their relationships, often through routine or ritual. Others used routine/ritual to create an environment for their children that was loving, warm, and consistent.

When Bryce was still seeing his son at supervised visits it was important to him to create routines as a way of reassuring his son that he was still in his life,

I tried to, what I did was I, I always tried to create ah, um, (sigh) things that we did every time so that it was like he knew that when we got together this is what we're going to do first, continuity in our visits ... and so that was the first we created a routine, um, then we would watch a movie and make lunch, and so what we did was we had, I was really trying to build a solid routine that we kind of followed every time we had our visits so that he would know that you know okay, now we're going to do this, now we're going to do that and you know, and all things that he enjoyed, so...it made it easier, kids like routines, so... [Bryce]

To the best of his ability, given the institutional constraints, Bryce was rebuilding his nurturing relationship with C. Now that Bryce has primary custody, he is still working to rebuild what was lost during the period he was unable to be with his son unsupervised.

... the other thing that I'm trying to do is build once again you know history between us, like you know, every summer we're going on a vacation together, so and we talked about it together ... I'm trying to build routines again, you know ... we have Christmas night together and Christmas day is with his mom ... and then we have our routines for the holidays, again, and birthdays and everything else and vacations, like you know, we were in Hawaii together, we had a blast, this year we're going to Newport ... so I'm trying to recreate family routines that we all had growing up that we, you know, in the time frame that he hasn't been around I never got to create with him, so ah, like our Christmas routine is

our, that I'm creating is that since we have Christmas Eve together ah, we pick a country and then we get something to do with that Christmas in that country, like you know, ah, last year we had a German pickle, they hide a pickle on the Christmas tree ... but so then every year we're going to pick a country and then get something from that country's tradition and get that involved into ours, and integrate it, which is pretty cool... [Bryce]

For Mitch, his time with the children post-divorce has brought opportunities to create routines and rituals that did not previously exist. These routines create opportunities for warmth, engagement, and accessibility. Mitch's pre-divorce parenting is self-described as his being the "provider," "pre-divorce it was more of, kind of an understood role that I'm income provider and she's full-time mother." Post-divorce, Mitch's parenting is evolving from the more basic involvement to a more nurturing relationship,

... so that's part of our family tradition that evolved from the divorce, is my involvement in the kitchen is a lot more and the kids' involvement with me in the kitchen is a lot more.

Um, we have a little ticket system to where you know those little raffle tickets, I found a spool of these raffle tickets and then I go out of my way to write down on these little tickets you know, their initials and date stamp it and then also the activity that they've done so if they, if they took the time to help their little sister with something, like putting her shoes on, or if they helped in the kitchen, or they cleaned up the bathrooms, or did something that, you know, was above and beyond, you know, what they're being asked to do, they just do it, I usually reward them with a couple free tickets and when they get a certain amount of tickets, you know, whether it's 20 or 30 tickets, then they get to do a family activity together, you know, like they want to go see a movie or go to Chucky Cheese, or do something that they want to do they can they can say hey, I got, I want to trade in some tickets to do this... [Mitch]

Bobby's approach was actually the anti-routine, as he describes here,

... sometimes she sleeps for 14 hours... I don't know if that's just sheer exhaustion ... she's exhausted because her mom's so neurotic, she comes to my house and has to relax ... going to dad's house is not, it gets away

from the day-to-day structure of got to make your bed, gotta get up, get dressed, make your bed, clean your room, pick up your toys, no you can't watch Hannah Montana 'til noon and you know, you gotta help do chores around the house ... [Bobby]

Bobby describes his time with his daughter as an opportunity for her to recover from the intensity of her time with her mother. This might be why Bobby refers to himself as a "Disneyland Dad."

Creating routines and/or rituals with their children post-divorce appeared to be one way for fathers to accomplish the engagement, warmth, accessibility, and responsibility components of nurturing. For Bryce, creating routines or rituals during his time with his son during supervised parenting was a means to reassure his son that he was still present in his life and that he would continue to be present, despite the external constraints. Bryce's rituals and routines were directed at soothing and comforting his son during a very uncertain time. Once the supervised parenting ended, Bryce shifted his use of routine and ritual to focus on rebuilding the bond that had occurred during C's early childhood, as well as to create new common memories and family structure. Mitch also used routine and ritual to rebuild bonds after a tumultuous divorce. As Mitch said, "I think there's ... a lot of ground to be made up ..." Bobby describes an approach that is devoid of routine, but one that in that contrast, is equally supportive of his daughter's emotional and developmental needs. It appears that for these fathers, the use of routines and rituals with their children is a means of nurturing.

**Institution/System.** This theme reflects participants' references to institutions or systems such as family court, divorce proceedings, lawyers, service providers, public institutions (i.e. family services, supervised visitation, schools). Most of the fathers felt that these sort of external institutions and systems negatively impacted their parenting



and nurturing to varying degrees. Bobby's comment, "... that's what the State, that's what our attorney's worked out. I used to get Wednesday night dinners but there's too many logistics ..." alludes to Bobby's feeling that he did not have a lot of choice with regard to the amount of time he spent with his daughter; he felt that his access to his daughter was blocked.

Before his current every-other-weekend schedule, Mitch's parenting time was significantly restricted by the court, "the first four months of our separation I was reduced down to a visitation of eight hours every week with all the kids ...". Mitch's ex-wife had made allegations that resulted in temporarily restricted parenting (he did not divulge the nature of the allegations in the interview) and left Mitch with the feeling that his ability to be with his children was negatively impacted by the system, which was required to respond to such allegations,

... and then going through the process of the allegations that came out that further complicated our case and kept me further away from our kids for a longer period of time ... the part that I'm disappointed about through the process is it's almost like the system supports ... [Mitch]

Another way in which Mitch experienced what he believed was bias in the system arose from his pre-divorce role as the primary provider. Mitch had worked two jobs so that his wife could stay home as a "full-time mother" because they had mutually agreed that this was in the best interest of their children. However, when Mitch requested shared parenting of the children post-divorce, he was surprised by the outcome,

... the part that was a reality check going through the process is because we structured it in such a way to where she was full time mother and I worked two jobs to accommodate that, I was, I was almost penalized for that being that when I requested a 50/50 joint parenting schedule I was refused because the mother had the more dominant role in, in child rearing ... and I felt that that shouldn't have been a punishment, you know, ... and it was used in that fashion, where, you were not, you did not have the role

of parenting like the mother did, so therefore that that majority role goes to the mother ... I would expect that you know there'd be a lot more kind of ah, ah, support as far as sharing that relationship with each parent. [Mitch]

Bryce's situation was much more severe, as his divorce could be characterized as "high conflict." Bryce's divorce included allegations of domestic violence that resulted in a protective order against him that included not only his wife, but his son as well. Bryce was also incarcerated for six months as a result of a protective order violation. Not only was Bryce's time with his son restricted, but even the manner in which he could communicate with his son was controlled, effectively negating many of the nurturing functions.

... yeah, I didn't have any visitation ... zero, and then I ended up violating a court order, a protection order, and ended up in jail for six months ... there was absolutely no contact ... it changed dramatically, it went from a daily routine to you know a zero routine ... [Bryce]

It was very difficult emotionally for Bryce to move from being his son's primary parent to no involvement whatsoever. At one point in the interview, Bryce expressed that after losing access to his son, he no longer knew who he was, "I was like, my whole self-being was ripped out and lost; I had no definition of who I was any more."

After incarceration, Bryce moved to supervised parenting in a facility where a staff member was present and monitored all visits between parents and children.

I was supposed to have him, visit him Saturday and Sunday, the court's are just insane, they would give you all this, you know, they make it sound so great, okay well you're going to have eight hours on Saturday and eight hours on Sunday was the visitation order, but it's supervised, but yeah, good luck finding anywhere to have those supervised visits eight hours each day, or number one to afford them or number two to even find it available was impossible ... and so you weren't really a parent, you were just a playmate at that point... [Bryce]

Although the intent of supervised parenting is to preserve parenting relationships in cases where children might otherwise be unsafe, supervised parenting from this parent's perspective appeared to fall far short of the ideal. As Bryce noted in his interview, there was a significant disconnect between what the courts might order and what the supervised parenting centers could actually provide. So, while Bryce was "given" eight hours of parenting on Saturday and eight on Sunday, what the center could accommodate was significantly less. Bryce started with four to five hours on Saturdays; over time, that was reduced to two hours every Saturday. Even if time were available at the centers, the cost (upwards of \$50/hour) was prohibitive for Bryce.

To a certain extent, engagement can be achieved in supervised parenting, even warmth can be provided, but all interactions are controlled and monitored by the supervisors and certain topics are off-limits for discussion. Bryce commented on his ability to talk with his son,

I mean, you know, we weren't allowed to talk about his life, really in the supervised visits, I mean it was like you're not allowed, I mean you could talk, it's not like they were right there but, let me rephrase that, some of the people didn't care and they were in the corner and you did whatever you wanted, and you know, he'd tell me about school and his friends, um, and I'd ask, I'd always ask him who his best friend is, how was class going, you know how's your grades, but literally in ah, I mean at a certain point the visits got to an hour and an hour and a half's time, I mean, you didn't really have enough time to really do anything other than you know than have lunch and play a game... [Bryce]

Jason's experience with the system was not as negative as he was awarded primary custody of the boys. Jason was somewhat "off-hand" or self-deprecating about his parenting status; he frequently referred to his fathering role as "it is what it is," almost as if he could "take it or leave it." This characterization contrasted noticeably with the feelings of other participants about their fathering role. The following passage, however, reflects just how strongly Jason wanted to parent his children and was willing to "engage" the system to achieve that.

about eight months later, she wanted custody of the kids, so she went back to court to get custody of the boys, 'cause as she said, her and Tom would

be happy just with the two boys, they didn't have to have any other kids, well obviously I wasn't going to roll over and play dead and let her have custody so we went back to court, um, because she filed papers. [Jason]

In Jason's case, the court structure/institution in a sense enhanced his ability to nurture his children by awarding him primary custody of his boys.

The courts and supervised visitation were not the only institutions that created obstacles to nurturing functions. Mike had this experience with his daughter's school,

... certain institutions, I don't think they are, what I learned is they just forget, it's not necessarily that they're against you, but they just forget to send the report card, or send the information about school... [Mike]

In this case, the school might have been an obstacle to Mike being responsible towards his daughter's education. In Mike's case, however, he asked a lawyer-friend to write a letter outlining Mike's parental rights; since then, Mike has been inundated with paperwork.

Parenting time after divorce (formerly known as visitation) is directly by the court—unless parents can negotiate effectively on their own and present a plan to the court—and influences fathers' ability to be with their children and thus nurture them. Three of the participants (Bobby, Bryce, and Mitch) felt that parenting time as determined by the courts negatively impacted their ability to parent their children. These fathers felt that their time with their children was unduly or unfairly reduced or restricted.

For those participants whose divorces were more amiable (Mike and Tom), there was less institutional intervention and therefore their parenting time arrangements were more agreeable; Mike and Tom were able to work collaboratively with their ex-wives to establish parenting schedules that were, for the most part, acceptable. Jason, having been awarded primary custody from the start, had a more positive experience with the court

system. This was reinforced when Jason was forced to return to the courts by his ex-wife, who was demanding full custody; the outcome was actually increased time for Jason. Finally, it is notable that as the only non-divorced participant, Chase's experience of parenting time has been far less adversarial than the other participants.

The participants in this study experienced a range of parenting time arrangements from, at one point, no parenting time to primary custody. Four of the fathers had some variation on the every-other-weekend schedule. Bobby referred to it as "you know, the 72-hours ... twice a month ... Friday night at 7 o'clock to Sunday at 7 o'clock." Bobby attributed this schedule to "the state." Mitch credits the courts with his parenting schedule as well, "the way our permanent orders were decided is every other weekend visitation period, so I'll have a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and then Monday take them to school...". Mitch again references the institutional involvement when talking about picking up his children, "the orders said pick the kids up at school...they get out at 3:15...it was pretty stressful...so I'll pick them up at 5 o'clock from mom's, which is a little bit of I guess stipulation on our orders."

Bryce experienced the most significant imposition of "the system" with regard to parenting time. When he first saw his son again in supervision after being away for six months, Bryce described the relationship as "strained at best, um ... there was just no continuity." Bryce explained how it was necessary each week to readjust to both his and his son's emotional needs; to recreate the relationship each week. The early months in supervised parenting were "very stressful" for Bryce.

Other forms of contact and availability were affected by systems and institutions as well. Bryce reflected on his inability to contact his son by phone and the court's reaction to his efforts.

I called ... it was a six month period, and I called every day two times a day for six months and never once got a hold of him, and for, in a year's time, my phone log, I got a hold of him one time in a year, and the judge said, well you must have just missed him, and I'm like whoa. I said there's Sunday night at 8 o'clock? Where the hell is he, he has school in the morning. Then the judge was well, I think you're calling too much ... [Bryce]

Bobby also experiences difficulty communicating with his daughter between visits; by Bobby's account, he enjoys about two hours of phone contact with his daughter per month. The obstacle in this case is not specifically the court, but it is the result of the institution of divorce.

I can't have a conversation with my kid on the phone without being on speaker phone thinking that mom's in the background kind of going, you know, pulling on the ear, okay, sounds like, two words, like she's playing, she's coaching, 'cause sometimes I mean, I can tell when we're talking and I can tell when you know Mom is giving signals because the flow of conversation gets short and choppy and there's distractions and you know, it's just, there's too much going on ... [Bobby]

Institutions or systems such as family court, divorce proceedings, lawyers, service providers, public institutions (i.e. family services, supervised visitation, schools) did impact the experiences of fathers in this study as they attempted to nurture their children post-divorce. Many of the institutional experiences were negative or created obstacles to these fathers. Fathers described experiences that ranged from their access to their children being restricted (or denied), unsatisfactory parenting schedules, monitored parent-child interactions at supervision centers, limited phone access, to being "forgotten" by their

children's schools. Each of these experiences interfered with the desire of these fathers to nurture their children.

### **Summary of External Themes**

The external themes identified in this section create a post-divorce environment that shaped the experience of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce. The themes reflected both opportunities and obstacles for the fathers. While some of the themes might be present in both intact and divorced families—for example, teaching their children, engaging in activities, or creating routines and rituals—other themes would likely not exist without the institution of divorce, for example step-parents and the involvement of external systems such as the courts.

Based on the fathers' comments, it appeared that teaching their children, engaging in activities, and creating routines and rituals with their children were positive experiences, ones that the fathers took great pleasure in engaging in. These external themes seemed to provide opportunities for fathers to expand their nurturing relationship with their children. Conversely, external themes such as institutions, systems, and parenting time awarded by the courts, seemed to create aggravation and stress for the fathers. These external themes seemed to more often than not result in obstacles to the fathers' ability to nurture their children. Step-parents was one external theme that resulted in positive experiences for some fathers and negative for others.

### **Internal Themes**

The following themes—the “bad period,” “what’s missing,” self-assessment, and feelings about being a dad—reflect the thoughts and feelings described by the participants as they attempted to nurture their children post-divorce. These themes

appeared to be internal to the participant—thoughts, feelings, emotions, reactions—rather than existing in relation to something external to the fathers’ life; although, it is likely that the thoughts, feelings, and emotions arose in response to the external condition of “divorce.”

**The “bad period.”** The fathers in this study reflected on what I characterized as their “bad period,” a period where emotions related to the divorce or the divorce process were mostly negative and subsequent actions by the participants were often negative as well. Participants described how these periods affected not only themselves, but their ability to nurture their children as well.

Bobby turned to dating in the first couple of years of divorce, “rebound” relationships. He refers to these events as the “pitfalls of trying to figure stuff out” and believes his behavior resulted in his daughter experiencing anxiety over separation and becoming possessive of him. Mike acknowledged his inability to be emotionally available for his daughter, “she had the same needs for me ... and I wasn’t meeting those needs for a period of time ...”.

Bryce also experienced a “bad period” that he described as “devastating” “... like spiraling out of control like somebody threw me out of an airplane and I didn’t know if I had a chute or not.” Bryce felt as if he had lost his identity as a father, an experience so painful that he needed to hide it from his son, “it’s like you know, you’re just, you’re kind of adding more gas to the fire by trying to keep a solid front for your kid.” Chase reflected that, “it killed me ... I was always depressed ...”. Mike reflected on his “bad period” as well,



at that point um, I say it was probably the worst as a father that I was, I was very, ... um, I was very focused on creating some stability for myself emotionally, and I went through that for about three or four months so I started seeing C. on the schedule and...um, that's when I started to learn how to parent in a different way, and that's also when I sort of learned that I wasn't really parenting, because of, just the instability within our marriage, the incompatibility between her mother ... [Mike]

Despite having primary custody, Jason's experiences in the early years after the divorce, during time away from his boys, were hurtful as well, although he states that he got used to it.

at first it was ah, it was pretty painful, 'cause like I said, I was with them mostly all the time anyway ... and ... it was also, not only painful, but it was also very um ... stressful ... these are my kids, they should be with me, and so it hurts when they're not there, after awhile, you grow accustomed to them not being there and it's not as big of a deal. [Jason]

The good news was that this period did not last forever. Mike eventually sorted things out, "I went through my own little crisis and I wasn't able to give anything to anybody ... then when I got to the place where I should have been, and I sort of dealt with my shit." Chase overcame the "bad period" as well, once he returned to his home state after a year away trying to find work,

... then I came back...and that's when everything happened, I got back to normal and I had her every weekend and you know, we had a house and it was just, it was real good...it was healthy for me to come back and I'm glad I came back because I just, I couldn't be like some, some of the people that I know...and they have kids that are out of state and they just don't see them, and this has been years and it's just like I couldn't, I can't do that, I can't I can't do it, you know... [Chase]

Tom had also pulled away for a period of time, a period when he was exploring who he was, but ultimately was able to reconnect with his children.

I was separating from them, I can see that now ... yeah, I was really pulling away you know, I didn't want to be there ... I can look back now and see that I was really pulling away ... but um, once I moved out on my own then it was back to being very involved with them ... [Tom]

During these bad periods, it was difficult for these fathers to maintain a nurturing relationship with their children. Fathers were required to negotiate their feelings around the divorce, as well as their feelings about being separated from their children. There was a tremendous amount of pain associated with being separated from their children. As a result, they struggled and were often emotionally unavailable to their children. They withdrew—physically, emotionally, and sometimes both. In the end, however, the bad period passed, or at least subsided, and the fathers were once again able to move forward with nurturing their children.

**What's missing/absence.** IPA draws the concept of absence from Sartre in that experiences of a phenomenon include both what is present, as well as what is not present, in that experience (Smith et al., 2009). Many of the fathers referred to what was missing after divorce. Missing, mostly, was their children, and their ability to be with their children; what was missing was the ability to be present, which is almost synonymous with nurturing. This theme, what's missing/absence, ultimately subsumed a similar theme—thinking about their children.

Even though Jason enjoyed significantly more time with his children than the other fathers in the study, he still made it clear that divorce impacted the ability to nurture,

... not being around the kids really hurts ... all you do is think about what they're doing, what are they doing today, are they happy, are they doing whatever, you know ... in reality, it's something you get into your mind because you're worrying usually over nothing because if I had gone on a fishing trip I'd have been gone for a weekend too, and I wouldn't have worried about them as much ... [Jason]

Whereas Jason compared being separated from your children due to divorce as no different than being separated due to a fishing trip, being separated from one's children because of divorce *is* different. With divorce, one does not have the assumed access of a parent in an intact family; one cannot take the ability to be present for granted. Mitch was very aware of this,

... like I said, I made the mistake of taking this for granted too much when we were together, you know I kind of assumed you know that as a parent, you know as a father, I would always have that, this role in our family ...  
[Mitch]

Mitch went on to say,

... that period of time post kind of gave me that, gave me the impression, boy, I've lost a lot, so now that I've been given back the ah partial you know parenting time ... I'm much more responsive and much more present and there for the children. [Mitch]

Bobby was more direct when he stated, "I wish I could be there 24/7 but I can't, I wish I could call every single day, but I can't." Chase found himself overcompensating in an effort to make up for what is missed,

... when you are ah divorcee, or you know you are separated and you don't have full custody, you can either think about it two ways, and I know people who think about it one way and I think about it this way, I try to do ... I try to overcompensate ... because of that time that's missed ... you know, so...I'll spend time, or when I'm talking to her on the phone, it's like if she wants to talk for hours, that's fine. You know, if she you know, whatever she wants to do on a weekend, it's kind of spoiling her, but ... honestly, it makes me feel better inside that I'm giving her that so she knows that you know, I do love her. I don't want my kids to ever think that I don't love them. I know too many people like that ...[Bobby]

Mike found the "good" in what was missing as a father post-divorce. He believed that the time he has away from his daughter allows him to actually spend more time thinking of her and her well-being,

I think every day I probably spend a considerable amount of time thinking about C and worrying about her issues, not so much worrying, but, 'cause I really think that these tensions are good and healthy, I don't see them as problems, I see this as growing and I think C so yeah it gives me an opportunity to do that and really so it's sort of a unique privilege I guess as a parent, and one of the things I didn't really do a lot of when I was married was...think about these things ... [Mike]

In Mike's case, nurturing outside of marriage may actually be better than it was inside the marriage.

Parenting post-divorce shifts dramatically for the non-custodial father. During the marriage, it appears that fathers sometimes "take for granted" the fact that they have unrestrained access to their children. This sentiment is described by Mitch,

... you know whereas before I, like I said, I made the mistake of taking this for granted too much when we were together, you know I kind of assumed you know that as a parent, you know as a father, I would always have that, this role in our family and it wasn't until it was totally stripped away that it made me realize that that's not the case ... [Mitch]

After the divorce, the children physically are no longer available 100 percent of the time; the children are absent. Initially, this absence was a source of distress for fathers in this study. Over time, however, the fathers were able to experience positive elements despite, or perhaps because of, the absence of their children.

... but I'd say that after losing, literally losing the parenting ability and the ability to be with my children when I wanted to be with the children and vice versa, it has completely turned around my awareness and my nurturing skills as far as being present and being available for the kids ... I don't think I would have come to on my own, eventually ... the hard reality of losing everything is just kind of an eye opener... [Mitch]

By experiencing loss, fathers became more aware of their nurturing role, and less inclined to take it for granted. Their ability to nurture their children was in many ways enhanced.

**Self-assessment.** The participants of this study engaged in a considerable amount of self-assessment during their interviews. In the initial coding, I characterized these

passages as looking back, reflecting, and “woulda, coulda, shoulda” kinds of statements. After re-reading them, placing them in context, I see them now more as “moving on” statements for Bobbie and Chase, a statement of strength for Bryce and Mitch, and statement of self-acceptance for Jason.

For Bobby, the ability to move forward emotionally will likely contribute positively to the nurturing relationship he will have with his daughter. With his emotions more “in balance” he can once again focus on being emotionally available to his daughter,

I’ve made, I’ve made my mistakes, I’ve gone through the pitfalls ... I’ve kind of cleaned up a lot of areas in my life, I don’t have any psycho ex-girlfriends or living arrangements ... I made my bed I gotta lay in it, I gotta deal with it, there’s nothing I can really change, it’s a way of reason, manifest destiny did not work out ... I’m kind of at that point where I’ve rebuilt in my personal life, I’m out of debt and moving on, you know? Maybe I’ll buy a house in the next two or three years, I don’t know, we’ll kind of see what happens. I’m content with what I am or what I’ve got and where I’m going ... you know, getting over the bitterness of divorce, I’m just trying to get to the point where I can move on and you know, have some solace in life ... [Bobby]

Chase expressed a desire to plan, to act proactively, to move forward in such a way that he would never again feel that he was unable to be there for his daughter,

... it definitely taught me something ... you know, it basically ... it basically put me in a position where it was like you know I don’t want to feel like this again ... so when I do go into my next endeavor, or my next job, or whatever it may be, I want to make sure that ... if this is not going to work out or something, that I set myself up so that I can go right into something else and I can still continue taking care of my child financially ... [Chase]

For Bryce, self-assessment meant looking back and realizing that all he ever wanted in life was to be a dad,

... originally what I wanted to be in life was a father, that's what I wanted to be, I mean that was the primary goal, it wasn't riches, it wasn't fame, it wasn't any of that, it was I wanted to be a dad ... [Bryce]

It is possible that knowing this about himself helped Bryce to persevere through the difficult periods. Having strength in his convictions, knowing that he had stayed "true to himself," would have contributed positively to Bryce's emotional well-being at those times when he felt that he was "spiraling out of control."

Mitch seems to have accepted the negative experience as necessary in his movement towards being a more nurturing father post-divorce.

I try to look at the positives in the sense that you know had we have stayed together, had, would I have, would it would it would the impact have been so traumatic for me as a father and a parent had it not occurred, so, even thought it was as devastating as it was, I think it made me a better parent in the sense that it's given me the ability to really realize that how important it is to be there for the kids. [Mitch]

I mean it's like that whole thing about when you grow older, you know if you had the wisdom you know when you're older that you know you could have applied it earlier or had, had more appreciation earlier on, I think that um, you know, it's like the ultimate irony of life, I guess ... [Mitch]

Jason reflected on the fact that no matter how hard you try, parenting is flawed, and this is okay.

... you're looking at what you think is their interest and you can't read their mind, you can start seeing little hints but you can't really, you know you ask your kids "what are you thinking about" half the time they'll say nothing, so, it's, you can't live their life for them but if you're a parent you've got to kind of guide them and you don't realize until you've got to a point that you can look back a little bit and say well yeah, that was probably the wrong way, so, um, it wasn't a major issue ... [Jason]

After the "bad period" subsided, fathers in this study were able to take a step back and assess themselves in the context of the post-divorce reality. In reflecting back, these fathers seem to recognize just how important their father

role is for them. For the most part, the emotional upheaval has given way to a new focus on nurturing their children.

**Feelings about being a dad.** Despite the obstacles some of the fathers faced in parenting and nurturing their children, the participants' feelings about being a father were universally positive. Bobby captured the diversity of the experience when he stated that fathering was "... like the color green, it's like there's so many different shades of green in the universe, you know, you really can't describe anything." Bryce and Jason noted the challenging nature of fathering. Bryce characterized it as "it's fun, and it's a challenge, and I wouldn't give it up for the world, it means, you know, it means too much." And Jason reflected that "it's work...it's a lot of work...it's frustrating at times, it can be rewarding at times...but parenting is a job and it has to be done, it has to be done right."

The fathers also captured what the experience of fathering meant to them, often reflecting back to the day their children were born. For Bobby, "being a dad is like the greatest thing in the world, probably the greatest day of my life. For Bryce, being a father "well it's a gift for ... I find that's a gift, ah, and an enjoyment." And for Mike, "it was wonderful, one of the most beautiful moments of my life." Chase commented that "when my daughter was born she was just everything to me." Finally, both Mitch and Tom used the term referred to how their role as a father was heartwarming. For Mitch, "it just warms my heart to see them smile and to capture moments with them." While for Tom, "it's just heartwarming, ... love being their dad, absolutely, it's great, yeah... it's just that inner feeling I'm really proud of them."

These statements reflect the absolute joy these fathers feel about being fathers. They also reflect how being a dad is important to these fathers (rather than how important

it is to their children that they are their fathers). Such positive feelings can be a resource for fathers when faced with some of the more trying obstacles associated with fathering post-divorce. These statements are even more poignant following the section on absence; it is hard not to wonder to what extent divorce made it possible for these fathers to access and express these feelings about their fathering role.

### **Summary of Internal Themes**

The internal themes reflected the thoughts and feelings of fathers as they responded to questions about nurturing their children post-divorce. The fathers' responses to the questions resulted in descriptions of emotional turmoil and distress in the periods leading up to and immediately surrounding divorce; turmoil and distress that negatively affected their ability to nurture their children. The fathers also described the sense of loss they felt over the absence of their children from their lives post-divorce; and how that loss highlighted the importance of their fathering role. After negotiating the "bad period," fathers were able to reflect on their own personal growth, drawing on strengths and expressing a desire to move forward. This self-assessment reflected how the fathers were able to return to a nurturing relationship with their children. Finally, the participants described their feelings about being a father, which were overwhelmingly positive. Overall, these themes reflected strength and commitment on behalf of these fathers to maintain, or rebuild, a nurturing relationship with their children.

### **Combined Themes**

The combined themes that emerged from the transcripts included both external factors and internal feelings associated with fathering and nurturing. Essentially, external



conditions often brought about a need for fathers to look inward and draw on their strengths to maintain or build their relationships with their children.

**Learning to be a dad.** Most of the fathers were very engaged in their children's lives prior to divorce. Therefore, it appears that their experience post-divorce was learning to be a father again under new circumstances, whether it was learning to be a father again (after having been separated), having the freedom to parent on their own, or learning, really, for the first time.

Bryce was the primary parent when his son was young, but he had lost a lot of time with his son, nearly six years, due to his high conflict divorce. As a result, he had to learn to be a dad with a son nearly six years older than when he last was able to truly be a parent,

I got to be more involved in and learning to re-deal with it because I didn't never have to deal with it before, um, and he's like ah, definitely emotional and so I would have to learn how to deal with a teenage boy's emotions, and the struggle between mom and dad ... [Bryce]

Post-divorce, some fathers were no longer required to "share" parenting with their children's mother in the same household. For example, once Mike overcame his "bad period" he was able to focus on being his daughter's dad again. He felt without the instability of his relationship with his ex-wife, he was able to redirect his energy to really parenting,

... so I started seeing [his daughter] on the schedule and ... that's when I started to learn how to parent in a different way, and that's also when I sort of learned that I wasn't really parenting, because of, just the instability within our marriage, the incompatibility between her mother and I ... [Mike]

... I took the time that I had with her and the first thing that I did is I made sure that every moment that I had like with her was valuable. Now that

doesn't mean that we were having fun or we loved each other well it was all touchy feely that just means it was valuable ... [Mike]

Mike acknowledged, however, that it was a learning process because his own father had not provided the guidance that Mike wanted to follow.

... and there was really no model for me, okay. My father was a very angry drunk so...that was out. So I had to sort of, I read books and stuff about it, but ultimately what I found was the way to be a father really wasn't different, the only difference was the time, that's it, everything else was the same. She had the same needs for me that she would if I was home, and I wasn't meeting those needs for a period of time, and so over time as I just did that stuff, tried to value my time with her ... [Mike]

I had to learn what being a nurturing parent was, I already talked about that, but I think I'm equally nurturing, I just think the nature of it is different, the nature of what nurture is (laughter) that's a pun, but it is, the nature of nurture is different as your child gets older so I think this is an on-going, you know, how do I nurture a 9-year old girl when I live in [city] and she lives on the other side of the state, I mean... [Mike]

Bobby and Mitch had both expressed that they were not as involved with their children pre-divorce, largely because of their work. After the divorce, Bobby was very pragmatic, he took a parenting class,

... probably one of the best things I ever did was I actually took a Love and Logic parenting class, and I still don't understand everything that, I only probably absorbed ten percent of what they were trying to tell me ... but on the most you know, primitive ape-like level, since I'm a guy, you know that I can fathom well I got what I got out of it ... [Bobby]

Mitch also had a lot to learn about parenting post-divorce, partly because he operated primarily in the provider role during the marriage, and partly because he was raised without a father.

I mean I have a bit more, I've never been exposed to the nurturing environment in the sense of anything other than having you know, a mom, ah, the father role in my upbringing was absent so I never really learned skills as far as what does a good father do? So I kind of had a deficit to make up, going into it, but I'd say that after losing, literally losing the ah parenting ability and the ability to be with my children when I wanted to

be with the children and vice versa, it has completely turned around my awareness and my nurturing skills as far as being present and being available for the kids. I mean this is something I don't think I would have come to on my own, eventually, ah...but I, the hard reality of losing everything is just kind of an eye opener... [Mitch]

For these fathers, the experience of nurturing their children post-divorce involved a certain degree of learning how to nurture. The fathers' described how their pre-divorce fathering experience determined the extent to which they needed to "learn" to nurture post-divorce. For Bryce, who was the primary caregiver prior to his divorce, he had to re-learn about fathering after nearly six years of constrained interaction with his son. Mike was also actively engaged pre-divorce, but learned after the divorce that the instability of his marriage had negatively influenced his parenting. Once he was able to focus his emotional energy on his daughter, and not his struggling marriage, Mike felt that he really learned how to nurture his daughter. Bobby and Mitch both expressed that they were not as involved pre-divorce, largely due to work commitments. Both divorce, both set about learning, almost for the first time, how to be a father. Finally, two of the fathers expressed that the lack of a positive father model in their childhood impacted their own fathering.

**Stereotypes and roles.** Both mothering and fathering are culturally and socially defined roles and with such roles come stereotypes. Role definitions and expectations frequently shaped the manner in which the participants approached nurturing.

At least two participants modeled their own fathering *in contrast* to their own father's stereotypical parenting, although they did not mean to be critical as each clearly cared deeply for their own father). Bryce said, "My dad never had time for me, I mean,

he worked 80, 90, 100 hours a week and so I wanted to be a father that was actually involved in their kids' lives." Chase recalled his father's approach to parenting,

... my dad was there and I mean he did everything, you know, he went to work, he paid the bills, you know, but he was just, he was a dad, and dad came home and he played with you for a little while and then he went to relax 'cause he had to go to work in the morning... [Chase]

Some participants made reference to gender-based stereotypes in relation to their parenting. When describing an incident where he needed to soothe his daughter's anxiety over being separated from her mother, Bobby said, "I think men aren't really wired that way...". Post-divorce Bobby took a *Love and Logic* parenting class; he noted that his ability to absorb what he as being taught about parenting was limited to the "...most you know primitive ape-like level, since I'm a guy, you know ...". Bryce reflected on being a full-time father early in his son's life, despite his recognition of society's belief that "you know, by design a woman is a better, you know, parent simply by gender...". Bryce said, "I was just like a mom, but not a mom. I was a full-time care-giver."

In more than one instance, the participants parented and nurtured in stark contrast to the stereotypes and role expectations. Jason described his sons this way,

... both of them cook very well because I'm the one that always cooked in the house, I've always cooked, I'm a decent cook anyways, so they grew up knowing how to cook and how to sew and how to work on cars and how to clean their room and how to do their own laundry... [Jason]

Bryce was also the full-time caregiver. His description of how he cared for C is almost "textbook" with regard to the role mothers traditionally play. Many of Bryce's parenting activities can be found in conventional characterizations of nurturing and are generally associated with mothers.

I had the ability to stay home during the days and raise him from early birth to kindergarten ... I was his full-time care giver ... it was Monday

through Friday ... full-time job being a dad, um, mom got home at you know six o'clock and dinner'd be ready and we'd have dinner ... I'm the one who you know changed his diapers ... potty trained him ... took him to the dentist ... took him to the doctor ... fed him all his meals ... [Bryce]

And yet, because Bryce's divorce was very high conflict, Bryce was stripped of his parenting role for more than five years.

Actions speak louder than words. Although the fathers made references to common stereotypes about father roles and mother roles, their parenting behavior was clearly in contrast to these stereotypes. They did not appear to have internalized external expectations about gendered fathering roles; these expectations did not negatively affect their ability to nurture. Bobby was the only father that expressed insecurity in his abilities to parent his daughter using stereotypes. It is unclear, however, whether these insecurities are truly based in external influences—the stereotypes—or whether the stereotypes provided a “handy” excuse for his feelings.

**Before versus after.** One of the interview questions asked participants whether they believed they nurtured their children more, less, or the same after the divorce.

Before versus after was a combined theme because the personal process of one nurturing their children had been significantly altered by numerous external factors related to the institution of divorce. For the most part, the participants responded the same or more.

Bobby, for example, feels that

I would probably say I'm more nurturing, there's a lot more one-on-one time, there's lots of movies and snuggling on the couch watching you know, bed time stories and tickle torture ... I think my relationship is better now ... my weekends, she gets undivided daddy attention because I don't divide my time between her and somebody else ... [Bobby]

As does Chase,

... now I put forth more effort because I don't see 'em as much... I don't see them on a daily basis ... overcompensation just because you're not there, so more, I would say more... [Chase]

Mitch believes that he is more nurturing now, compared to his married life when he focused more on his provider role,

I'd say I'm more... you know whereas before I, like I said, I made the mistake of taking this for granted too much when we were together, you know I kind of assumed you know that as a parent, you know as a father, I would always have that, this role in our family and it wasn't until it was totally stripped away that it made me realize that that's not the case ... [Mitch]

I, probably more, you know, more hands on, I give more hugs, um, I give more accolades, appreciation, you know I vocalize more, ah, just to try to get the communication going, let the kids know that they're being thought of, like, the older ones are on cell phones now so I text message them and it's one way right now, you know I don't get too much back, but I keep trying, so I'd say that just being more vocal, being more active as far as letting the kids know that I'm thinking of them. [Mitch]

Finally, Tom believes he is more nurturing as well, "I want to say the same, but I think I'm more than I was ... I mean they're very important to me."

Jason believed that his parenting did not change much pre- and post-divorce as his wife was more focused on her career. Jason estimates that prior to the divorce he was functioning as the primary parent 65 to 75% of the time and that after the divorce,

... it probably didn't change much ... in 1979, I got custody of my daughter, her mother only visited once a year (unclear) I raised her basically on my own until about five years old and then I got married and we had the other two kids, but S. was never one to come home and cook, she did do the laundry, she was a very, um, very much a business person, she Phi Beta Kappa at DU in computer science and very intelligent woman but did not enjoy housework and cooking and raising kids and so on and so forth, so I pretty much did a lot of that myself anyways... I would say it'd be the same, pretty much ... [Jason]

Mike felt his nurturing was the same as well, even though he believed he had to learn what a nurturing parent was,

... you know, I think I'm...I'm the same, although I think that before the divorce I became less, so there's a dip, I think I started off as a father very nurturing, very into it ... [Mike]

I had to learn what being a nurturing parent was, I already talked about that, but I think I'm equally nurturing ... ultimately what I found was the way to be a father really wasn't different, the only difference was the time, that's it, everything else was the same. She had the same needs for me that she would if I was home, and I wasn't meeting those needs for a period of time, and so over time as I just did that stuff, tried to value my time with her ... [Mike]

Because of the dramatic changes in Bryce's parenting over the past six years, he felt that he was actually less nurturing,

... well 'cause I would, I was everything, I mean, in the beginning, I was, you know, I was the whole nine years you know from vaccinations to learning how to walk to you know ah potty training to starting kindergarten to you know ... I was constantly, you know, 24 hours a day in his life ... I didn't go to work until he was in bed so it's like his waking moments were spent with me, ah, for six years, six and a half years ... [Bryce]

Bryce was confident, however, that his nurturing role was returning, despite the many years that his relationship with his son was interrupted by incarceration, supervised visitation, and every-other-weekend parenting.

... it's like, if you didn't see a friend in 30 years you know, ah, you get right back into the it's like him and I were like that, we were so much alike and we'd been so bonded that I don't think anything coulda could of taken that away ... Am I going to be nurturing? I think I will evolve into being that again ... [Bryce]

For the most part, fathers described their experiences of nurturing the children post-divorce as being the same, or more nurturing, than before the divorce. It is possible that this response was related to one of the internal themes, "what's missing."

Experiencing the absence of their children reinforced to these fathers the importance of their relationships. Mike did acknowledge that there was a brief time, during the “bad period” where his nurturing was less than it had been. Only Bryce, due to the long period of supervised parenting, felt that he was less nurturing, and he expressed his commitment to return to his pre-divorce level as soon as possible.

### **Summary of Combined Themes**

The combined themes—learning to be a dad, stereotypes/roles, and “before versus after”—reflected experiences that included both external factors and internal feelings associated with fathering and nurturing post-divorce. These themes included the fathers’ descriptions how the “learned” to be a dad post-divorce. The experience of learning varied, ranging from re-learning after a long period of constrained fathering, to learning for the first time, to learning to parent on their own terms, without the influence of involvement of the mothers. The fathers also described their experience of “running up against” commonly held stereotypes around fathers and parenting. Fortunately, the fathers did not appear to have internalized the cultural and social external expectations; these expectations did not negatively affect their ability to nurture.

### **Overview of Themes**

The descriptions of fathers’ experiences nurturing post-divorce were distilled into three primary themes: external, internal, and combined. The themes reflected both opportunities and obstacles for the fathers. The external themes—teaching, activities, routines/rituals, step-parents, and systems/institutions—described elements of a post-divorce environment that shaped the experience of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce. The internal themes—the “bad period,” “what’s missing,” self-assessment, and



feelings about being a father—reflected the thoughts and feelings of fathers regarding their experiences nurturing their children post-divorce. The combined themes—learning to be a dad, stereotypes/roles, and “before versus after”—reflected experiences that included both external factors and internal feelings associated with fathering and nurturing post-divorce. Overall, these themes reflected strength and commitment on behalf of these fathers, despite numerous emotional obstacles, to maintain, or rebuild, a nurturing relationship with their children.

#### Post-Divorce Nurturing Experience: *Being There*

The intent of phenomenology is to arrive at the “essence” of the lived experience of a particular phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) defined essence as “that what makes a thing what it is (and without which it would not be what it is) (p. 177). Van Manen also described a difference between an empirical essence and a fundamental or ideal essence. The first being, for example in the case of nurturing, the nuts and bolts of nurturing as identified by the fathers. The second would represent for example, the ideal of nurturing that all real fathers (and parents) are “oriented to” (p. 177).

Nurturing, as described in the previous sections, aligns more closely with the empirical essence; nurturing post-divorce for these fathers is as they have described it. It is a description presented in such a way so that others can examine and comprehend that experience (Smith, et al., 2009). These fathers’ descriptions of the experience focused both on the context within which nurturing occurred, and the experience. Nurturing post-divorce reflects a composite of common actions, situations, and feelings for these fathers. Nurturing post-divorce is *being there*, despite obstacles.

### A Deeper Level of Interpretation: *Being There*

The themes discussed previously are largely descriptive, but they create the context within which and describe fathers' experiences nurturing their children post-divorce. Smith, et al. (2009) write that in their experience novice researchers engaging in IPA are "too cautious, producing analyses that are too descriptive" (p. 103). They recommend that researchers challenge themselves to reach a deeper level of analysis, to move beyond the descriptive to the interpretative.

... having analyzed a whole transcript, we notice a particularly resonant passage and so move to a deeper, more detailed reading of the part. One of the exhilarating features of this type of process comes from the realization that often the increasing depth of analysis of the part, the short extract, illuminates and can be seen as integrally related to the analysis of the whole..." (Smith et. al., 2009, p. 104)

Initially, *being there* was a code, and then a theme; ultimately, *being there* became the essence. The segments of the transcripts where fathers actually used the phrase "being there" were mostly descriptive as well, and gave rise to the initial coding label of *being there*. The passages introduced in this section, however, were not necessarily coded as *being there* in the first or second pass of analysis. It was only after I had completed the coding, created the theme categories, consolidated the similarly coded sections into single digital files, and was working on summarizing those files that I went back and read through the entire transcripts again.

At that point, a different kind of being there emerged from the transcripts, during a deeper level of analysis/interpretation. The following paragraphs try to capture *being there* for these fathers from that next level of analysis, and perhaps the deeper psychological meaning *being there* holds for each. The vignettes are followed by a summary and analysis of the meaning of *being there* in this study.

## Bobby

... as a dad ... not being a full-time parent you're kind of on the outside looking in, and almost like you look at this snap, you get a snap shot of time out of her life, which is the time you spend with her, but the rest of the time it's like, you're on the outside of the window looking in ... you're not really there, so you need to ... I mean I can be there for dance recitals, and graduations, and ah, you know, little presentations with school, but it's pretty much on a limited basis, it's not the guy picking up after school, dropping off on the way to school, not taking her to Girl Scouts on Thursday nights, I'm not there to do the homework every single night ...  
[Bobby]

In this passage, Bobby describes what he thinks a father should be doing, taking his daughter to school, picking her up, participating with her in Girl Scouts, and doing homework; simple things that most married fathers might take for granted. In Bobby's case, these simple activities are missing because he is no longer married to K's mother; he is no longer a full-time father. Instead, Bobby's interaction with K is like a "snapshot of time"; it is "framed" and structured. It is also as if Bobby is on the outside looking in.

Bobby uses a number of terms or phrases to describe his post-divorce father status. He refers often to not being a "full-time dad" or "full-time parent;" in fact, it is the first thing Bobby says at the start of the interview when asked to "tell me about your relationship with your daughter." His focus turns immediately to what he is not; his focus turns to what he is missing.

*Being there* or conversely, not being there, is a constant undercurrent in Bobby's interview. He frequently alludes to people once in his life who are no longer there: "...people aren't always going to be around" and "...I mean I've had girlfriends ... and for many reasons they're not around ... you know ...". This raises questions as to how Bobby views his presence in his daughter's life: Is it permanent? Or is it something much more fleeting? At one point, he refers to K's stepfather's presence as he has "been there

forever... and stability, the house, the home, the neighborhood, the relationships..." and this seems to bother him. How much does this reflect Bobby's own insecurities as he tries to nurture K post-divorce?

### **Bryce**

... I had to prove to him over and over again that I ... he was always under the impression, and I figure he got that from his mom, that you know, next week, you won't be here, and he would always like, "dad, are you going to be here next week?" I'm like, "I'm here every week, son ..." "Well ... you never know, mom says you might not show up so I don't get my hopes up ..." "Yeah, well, son, you know what, what happened last week?" "Well we had a ..." "What happened the week before?" "We had a visit." "What happened the week before?" "We had a visit, but mom said not to count on ya ..." "Alright son, I'll be here next week, don't worry ..." [Bryce]

Despite having had much more restricted parenting and far fewer choices in parenting, Bryce does not dwell on the constraints. In this passage Bryce is relating an exchange between his son and himself during supervised visitation. Bryce's use of alternating dialogue and repetition of the key word, "son," brought life to the exchange. It also brought to mind a counselor/client exchange, when the counselor is trying to move a client beyond an "irrational belief" by helping the client see that reality is in fact very different. Bryce's son does not believe his father will be there every weekend, or he is afraid to believe this (because what if he believes and then is let down?). Bryce patiently walks his son through the last three or four weekends, emphasizing each time the fallacy of his son's belief.

To me, the repeated use of "son" strengthened the bond between father and child in the story. I can still hear the emphasis from the interview, the almost Ward Cleaver/Ozzie Nelson "voice" Bryce used when telling the story. The use of the term son, with the slight pause, instead of his son's name, seemed to me to cement Bryce's place as

his son's father. Bryce verbally provided "proof" to his son that he was going to physically "be there" every week, no matter what his son's mother said.

In reality, Bryce is putting up a good front; this confidence is a façade. Bryce experienced a loss around parenting his son, and the confidence Bryce expressed to his son each week, hid tremendous personal pain.

...it was devastating, it was like I didn't know where I was going...It's devastating in your life, that you know, you really just don't know who you are anymore, and...you're constantly feeling that your child, and they see that in you, you don't know who you are and they don't know who they are, and it just created, ah, you know, the pain that it created in me was always something you had to hide so that it didn't create it in your son... [Bryce]

However, Bryce appears to have hid this pain well,

trying to you know, keep a solid front for your kid when you do see him and the minute you leave, I mean literally the minute I'd leave, it was like, I was like, it'll be another week before I see this kid and what am I going to do, what do I do with my life now ... [Bryce]

In Bryce's case, the ability to nurture his son post-divorce was severely impaired. Not only by the institutional constraints (incarceration and supervised parenting), but by his own emotional distress as well. In time, Bryce was able to overcome both the external and internal obstacles and is currently re-establishing his relationship with his son. My observation would be that Bryce demonstrated extraordinary perseverance in his efforts to *be there* for his son.

### **Chase**

... I was working the day labor, and I would take my ten dollars, I would you know I got um, like \$20 'cause they were taking child support out of that, and I would take \$10 out of that and buy a phone card, and whatever groceries I could get and I'd call my daughter and I'd sit up there and I'd talk to her for the rest of the night ... and I did that on a daily basis ... [Chase]

Chase struggled with his ability to be there for his daughter at first. Immediately following the separation from his wife, Chase took a job in another state. Once there, he lost that job and could not afford to come home and be with his daughter,

... that was a horrible feeling ... I was always depressed ... you know, I didn't have my child ... you don't want your kid to think you don't love 'em or that you've done something wrong to them, and you're just working your life out, which has nothing to do with them ... [Chase]

Because he and his former wife have never officially divorced, there is no court-ordered structure to his parenting arrangement. And yet, being able to pay child support, to provide for his daughter financially, appears to be very closely related to Chase's sense of being there for his daughter, "well you should definitely be there for them emotionally, mentally, of course financially is always a big help."

Chase is the only participant that mentioned paying child support, which is notable in that Chase is the only participant whose relationship with his daughter is not framed by the institutional requirements usually found with divorce. I found myself questioning whether or not this was because without child support being "imposed from above" by the court system, Chase was more inclined to pay; or whether larger societal and cultural forces were at play, in particular the stereotype that fathers of color frequently do not maintain a presence in their children's lives.

### **Jason**

... it's work, it's a lot of work ... it's frustrating at times, it can be rewarding at times ... but it's ... parenting is a job and it has to be done, it has to be done right, um...this sounds stupid and cliché but that's really what it is, you're not their best friend, and you're not supposed to be a best friend, usually you get along, but sometimes you don't... [Jason]

["how do you know you've done the job right?] ah ... you really don't until they're grown up and then you're dead and it doesn't matter, I guess ... (laughs) [Jason]

Jason's transcript was almost silent on *being there* compared with other participants. It is possible that this reflects the considerably greater amount of time Jason had with his children. Jason had full custody of his daughter from his first marriage, and was granted primary custody of his sons from his second marriage because his wife "wanted out" of the marriage. She subsequently fought for full-custody to which Jason responded, "I wasn't going to roll over and play dead and let her have custody so we went back to court...". This statement demonstrates just how much Jason wanted to parent his children. Just because Jason's being there is unspoken, it is not non-existent.

### **Mike**

... I think that after the divorce I had to redefine myself as a father ... before the divorce I was there every night, ah, I made dinner, we ate together at a table ... even though I was there, I often times wasn't there, I was angry, I was, we fought, ah, and you know ... and I ended up moving out and I ended up having to go to a different city ... at that point I say it was probably the worst as a father that I was ... I was very focused on creating some stability for myself emotionally, and I went through that for about three or four months ... that's when I started to learn how to parent in a different way, and that's also when I sort of learned that I wasn't really parenting ... [Mike]

During his marriage, simply being there physically may not have been sufficient for nurturing. Engagement was required. Mike recognizes that although he was physically present, he was not emotionally available for his daughter and this was frightening for her. According to Mike, "even though I was there, I often times wasn't there, I was angry...we fought...and [his daughter] sometimes talks about it and says it was a very tense time for her and she was afraid that...we would divorce." Mike came across as very cerebral, solution-oriented. If there was a problem, he was going to think on it and come up with a solution to fix it. Mike's cognitive knowledge of being his

daughter's parent was not sufficient, however. Mike could not "think" his way entirely through his fathering; he needed emotional engagement as well.

Mike's own father was an "angry alcoholic" who provided no guidance, did not model how to be a father. Ultimately, Mike realized that he needed to "learn" how to be a father. He had to learn how to be there. Since the divorce, Mike realized that he can be a father without always being there. As Mike says, "...what I found was the way to be a father really wasn't different, the only difference was the time, that's it, everything else was the same."

### **Mitch**

... pre-divorce it was more of, kind of an understood role that I'm income provider and she's full-time mother, and, I kind of took my role a little bit for granted in the sense that I never thought I'd be taken away from the kids ... Whereas now, I've, I've realized that I made a mistake of putting my work before my family, and so it gave me the appreciation of family time much more so after because I lost ... I lost my family ... it was a devastating loss and you know, that, that, that saying as far as you know you don't appreciate something until it's gone ... I've lost a lot, so now that I've been given back the ah partial you know, parenting time, every other weekend, which is better than nothing, I'm much more responsive and much more present and there for the children, I'm so far more involved than I think I have ever been. [Mitch]

While married, Mitch engaged in many traditional activities with his children; in particular, he frequently served as a coach for his older boys' Little League teams, and his older daughters' volleyball and softball teams. Mitch, more than any other participant, described his pre-divorce fathering role as traditional. He was the provider. This traditional role, however, interfered with Mitch's ability to *be there*.

Mitch refers frequently to the structure of his parenting time post-divorce; the externally imposed conditions that restrict his ability to be available for his children.



What struck Mitch the most in the divorce process, however, was the feeling of being penalized for his traditional provider role,

... she was full-time mother and I, I worked two jobs to accommodate that, I was, I was almost penalized for that, for being that ... when I requested a 50/50 joint parenting schedule I was refused because the mother had the more dominant role in, in child rearing ... [Mitch]

For Mitch, being there, in the traditional sense of being a provider, was apparently was not sufficient in the court's eyes to award him a more equal division of parenting time, even though in many ways it is what our society expects men to do.

Mitch appears to have experienced being there for his children as the absence or loss of that relationship, at least initially. Mitch realizes now that simply being there physically, or being the provider, was insufficient for developing a nurturing relationship. Post-divorce, Mitch's experience of nurturing his children has expanded,

I'll say that being available, they're the number one focus and all, all, all the activities and decisions and stuff put them in the center of the decision making process, so I guess in that sense the role of being that full-time parent...I give to the kids on those weekends that I have, in the time we spend together. [Mitch]

Mitch found that his traditional fathering role of provider did not allow for the kind of engagement he now realizes is essential for nurturing. Clearly Mitch's new role is more meaningful, "it feels good to be there for the kids ... it's much more powerful for, for me emotionally now than I think it was when we were together" [married to his children's mother].

## **Tom**

I was really separating, I was detaching from them ... I was separating from them and I can see that now ... yeah, I was really pulling away and you know, I, I didn't want to be there, I knew I, I didn't know what it was, well I mean just personal issues that were going on with me, I was

wanting to identify all that and so I wanted to be something different ...  
[Tom]

There are many obstacles to being there. Most of the participants expressed that immediately prior to their divorces, they were detached or were unavailable to their children in some way. They were not able to *be there*. Tom's experience of being detached was different from the other participants. Tom was a Gay man who had lived many years in a heterosexual marriage. His exploration of his own sexuality coincided with the deterioration of his marriage, and caused a separation from his daughters as well. In time, however, Tom and his wife separated; after six years he moved into a separate home, he is in a committed relationship, and the period of separation from his daughters in the end was only a short period of time. As Tom concluded,

... but, you know normal to me is just being there for them, it's being part of their lives, so that was something that was very important to me, to both of us ... [Tom]

#### Summary Analysis of *Being There*

This analysis looks at the experience of the fathers in this study, as they try to *be there* for their children post-divorce. There are many obstacles to being there. Most of the participants expressed that immediately prior to their divorce, they were detached or were unavailable to their children in some way. They were not able to *be there*. Whereas for Mike it was an emotional detachment—he was focused on his own feelings—and for Bobby it was often physical—he was away from home and away from his daughter—Tom's experience of being detached, not being there, was something entirely different.

Whereas most of the participants acknowledge their need and desire to *be there* for their kids, it was only in Bobby's interview that it “sounded” more like a fear than a

commitment. It was possible that Bobby feared his ability to succeed at *being there* for his daughter, both emotionally and physically. Whereas Bobby felt he was not there physically, Mike recognized that he was not there emotionally. Mike had shut down in the parenting department because his own emotional needs needed to be tended to. In contrast to Bobby, however, Mike represented the situation as “glass half full”; he focused on the ability to *be there* every day. Bobby represented the situation as “glass half empty”; the time he was not with his daughter was lost to him. Mitch, not unlike Bobby, appeared to have experienced *being there* for his children as the absence or loss of that relationship as well, at least initially.

Bryce’s *being there* was tangible; in the excerpt from his transcript, it was clear Bryce would physically be there every weekend for his son. He seemed to draw on his previous relationship with his son to strengthen his conviction. Sprinkled throughout the transcripts are references to Bryce and his son’s earlier connection: “... we were so bonded together from early birth to his you know through his first seven years ... we were like two peas in a pod ...” and “we had so much time together for so long ...” and “... I had the ability to stay home during the days and raise him from, from early birth to kindergarten, I was his full-time caregiver ...” and finally, “... you know it was Monday through Friday, or you know, full-time job being a dad ...”.

Mike, like Bryce, acknowledged that he had a close bond with his daughter from the time she was an infant: “... I stayed at home with her for her first I think nine months of her life and I stayed home with her every summer while I was a teacher so I had this very close and tight bond ...”. Bobby referenced a bond too, “... it’s just this bond that I have, I mean ever since she came out of the womb and grabbed my finger...”, however in

contrast to Mike and Bryce, throughout the interview Bobby's confidence in *being there* was less certain, based either on his own behavior or the behaviors of others in the past.

Mitch, like Bobby, also referred to the structure of his parenting time post-divorce. For Mitch the externally imposed conditions restricted his ability to be available for his children. Mike also referenced not really having a choice in the amount of parenting he would have. Even though Mike's divorce was relatively "easy" as divorce processes go, the end result was still an extremely structured parenting schedule, which impacted the ability of the father to *be there*. As Mike noted, "you know, how do I nurture a 9-year old girl when I live in Fort Collins and she lives on the other side of the state...". Whereas Bobby referred frequently to the structure of parenting, as dictated by the courts, Mike's structure appeared to have been more self-imposed. Mike's repetition of the term "daughter," like Bryce's repetition of the term "son," verbally cemented the parent relationship for both fathers.

Mitch, like Mike, also realized that simply being there physically was insufficient for developing a nurturing relationship. The difference between the two however, was that Mike was there physically, but not emotionally; whereas Mitch found that his traditional fathering role of provider did not allow for the kind of presence he now realizes was essential for nurturing.

Jason's belief about the role of the father, or men in general, was traditional as well, but his pre-divorce role as a parent clearly was not. Jason describes his wife as a workaholic who had no time for the kids,

[ex-wife] was a workaholic and ... she worked late nights and they weren't around her a whole lot anyways, in fact, when she left she said, "I'm leaving the boys with you because you're the better parent than I am" ... [Jason]

On the other hand, Mitch and his wife intentionally adopted what would be more conventional parenting roles: "...we decided, you know, it's important that you try to maintain a full-time mother role and make sure the kids have what they need and I'll pick up an extra job and you know, I'll work..." and "I worked a lot and then [ex-wife] pretty much made a lot of the family decisions..." and "...it was more of ah, kind of an understood role that I'm income provider and she's full-time mother...".

While *being there*, or being present, reflected a composite of common actions, situations, and feelings for these fathers, the data would suggest that the ability to be present varied significantly for each individual. Marks and Palkovitz (2004) write that while commonality is important, it is also important that what each father experiences is unique. Each father experiences the exhortation to "*be there!*" for his kids differently.

## V – ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY

### Introduction

This study examined the lived experience of fathers as they nurture their children post-divorce. Because phenomenological research cannot be generalized to the broader population, the findings from this study and these fathers cannot be used to make generalizations about divorced fathers in general. What these findings do, however, is add to the body of knowledge that already exists on fathers and fathering; they illuminate the experience of divorced fathers in particular, a population often overlooked in the research literature.

### Findings in Relation to the Research Question

Van Manen (1990) writes that while “problem” questions are focused on solutions, correct knowledge, techniques, and results, phenomenological questions seek “the meaning and significance of certain phenomena” (p. 23). As noted in Chapter 3, this study would “answer” the research question by illuminating the nurturing experience of fathers who live separate from their children as the result of divorce. This study examined fathers’ experiences nurturing their children post-divorce and how these experiences shaped the meaning of fathering. Using a phenomenological approach, this study sought a deeper understanding of what fathers who were nurturing their children post-divorce were experiencing, and how they were experiencing it (Creswell, 2007).

The participants, although small in number, brought a diversity of divorce and parenting situations and experiences to the study. For example, some participants had experienced neutral to positive divorce situations; others had experienced the full “high conflict” divorce. Despite that, each participant expressed an on-going commitment to remaining present in his children’s lives; each participant expressed a positive nurturing relationship with his children.

Browne (1998) wrote extensively on how the act of being present is the essence of being a divorced non-custodial father. In my own research, I have “summed” the fathers’ experiences similarly. Nurturing consists of the act of being present, or as I have chosen to refer to the experience, *being there*. Based on this study, *being there* consists of both internal and external components. The ability for a father to *be there* for his children can be significantly influenced by external events, structures, institutions, and people. The five external themes—teaching, activities, step-parents, routine/rituals, and institutions/systems—shaped post-divorce nurturing for these fathers.

The nurturing experience is also deeply connected to each father’s psyche, mental health, and belief system; these were the internal conditions. The internal themes—the “bad period,” “what’s missing,” self-assessment, and feelings about being a father—reflected the fathers’ thoughts and feelings about nurturing their children post-divorce. The participants described their feelings about being a father, which were overwhelmingly positive. They were able to access their feelings about loss, about “what’s missing” when they were not with their children, and to reflect back on where they had been and where they hoped to go with their lives post-divorce.

Finally, a third category of themes, referred to as “combined,” reflected conditions, partly shaped by external circumstances and partly shaped by the fathers themselves, which influenced or impacted the fathers’ post-divorce nurturing experiences. The combined themes included learning to be a dad, stereotypes/roles, and “before versus after.” Most of the participants felt that they learned, or re-learned, how to be a father after they were divorced. Fathering is recognized as a role in our society, and carries certain stereotypes that reflect cultural understanding of that role. Fathers in this study described how they nurtured their children in concert with social expectations, as well as in spite of these stereotypes. And finally, “Before versus after” combined the external institution of divorce with each father’s own perception of nurturing; in most cases, the participants felt they were the same if not more nurturing with their children post-divorce.

Overall, these themes reflected strength and commitment on behalf of these fathers to maintain, or rebuild, a nurturing relationship with their children. It is possible that these fathers are actually more nurturing as a result of the external structure of divorce, and their internal desire to *be there* for their children.

My purpose for this research was to examine fathers’ experiences of nurturing their children post-divorce. What I conclude from the data in this study, the divorced fathers’ voices, is that nurturing is *being there*. Nurturing reflects a father’s ability to engage positively, to provide warmth, to be accessible, and to be responsible. Nurturing post-divorce reflects a composite of common actions, situations, and feelings for these fathers that exist as a result of both external and internal conditions arising from the divorce. At the crux of the research question is the issue of absence: How do fathers



engage in nurturing if they're not physically present? What's missing, or the absence of their children, is an integral element of the divorced father's nurturing experience.

Although *being there* emerged across interviews, it clearly did not hold the same meaning for each participant. Colorado's *Be There For Your Kids* campaign asserts: "Being present for your child will look different based on your life circumstances and your child's age, but at a minimum, it means doing everything you can to connect with your child in a manner that helps them to thrive and enjoy life" (ColoradoDads, n.d.). This statement focuses on the children's need for their father to *be there*; this study focused on the fathers' need to *be there*. The data suggests that the fathers in this study are doing just that; it suggests that nurturing fathers, or at least the nurturing fathers in this study, are committed to *being there* for their kids.

These findings were inductively derived; the general themes of this research and *being there* as the essence of nurturing post-divorce emerged from the data. I recognize that my interpretation of the data is only one of many interpretations that could have emerged.

### Findings in Relationship to the Literature

One of the purposes of this chapter is to consider the themes and findings identified in Chapter 4 in relation to the existing literature (Willig, 2008). The following discussion places the findings from Chapter 4 into a wider context; it is a dialogue between the findings and the existing literature (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 112) previously discussed in Chapter 2.

Dudley's (1996) review of five *qualitative* research studies on noncustodial fathers identified common themes amongst those studies; these themes are mirrored in

this study as well. Dudley identified themes around emotional adjustment to divorce; the studies reviewed found that fathers experienced divorce-related stress (the “bad period”). The studies also reported on problems with visitation, custody, the divorce proceedings, attorneys, and the courts; that fathers were dissatisfied with their parenting arrangements; and the perceived lack of fairness of the system (“institutions/systems”).

### **Defining Fathering**

As noted in Chapter 2, the fathering role is complex and evolving. It is also not a static process. How one *fathers* is not a constant. It changes as the father changes; it changes as the child changes (Dowd, 2000). Divorce, as an external factor, clearly affected and changed nurturing post-divorce. Fathers in this study noted how they had changed as individuals post-divorce, and how their nurturing had changed, frequently for the better. They also noted that as their children grew and developed, their fathering evolved as well.

I’m a more effective parent to an older kid. I was good when she was a baby, it was great, but I really enjoy the personality, the conversation, um, I’m a very cerebral person, you know, and you know these issues that emerge as a person develops from a child into an adolescent where these social networks develop and this identity is starting, how she sees herself, is starting to be formed, very fascinated by it and I, I have a very laid back...but objective approach ... [Mike]

In 1987, Pruett wrote that fatherhood was changing rapidly and that fathers desired nurturing relationships with their children. Nearly 20 years later, Marks and Palkovitz (2004) noted that in moving forward, contemporary fathering is actually moving back towards how fathering “looked” in colonial America; back to fathers who are highly involved and filling numerous paternal roles including “pedagogue, guidance counselor, benefactor, moral overseer, psychologist, model, progenitor, companion,

caregiver, disciplinarian, and provider” (p. 115). That fathers desire and engage in nurturing relationships with their children is clearly supported by the findings of this study.

### **Role and Identity**

Role and identity theory were frequently invoked in relation to this research. As was noted in Chapter 2, the male or fathering role traditionally emphasized traits such as independence, self-reliance, competitiveness, and achievement (Andronico & Horne, 2004); while mothers have been considered more competent in and central to the realm of child care and child well-being (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997).

Although most of the fathers made at least passing reference to the traditional or culturally-defined father/mother role dichotomy, their description of their relationships with their children showed something opposite. Their nurturing interactions were often in direct contrast to those stereotypes, both before the divorce and after. It is clear from fathering descriptions in this study that child care and child well-being is not solely the realm of the mother.

I was the whole nine years you know from vaccinations to learning how to walk to you know ah potty training to starting kindergarten to you know ... I was constantly, you know, 24 hours a day in his life ... [Bryce]

Andronico and Horne (2004) wrote that the fathering role emphasized traits such as independence, self-reliance, competitiveness, and achievement. Pruett (1993) also reported that fathering consists of characteristics that are unique to fathers. For example, Pruett reported on a 1974 study that found that fathers tend to encourage curiosity, to support problem solving, and to encourage both intellectual and physical challenges. Finally, Doucet (2006) also identified “father-specific” nurturing behaviors, indicating

that fathers tend to nurture through fun and playfulness, physical activity, problem solving, and promoting risk-taking and independence. The activities that the fathers in this study identified clearly reflected these sorts parenting characteristics. It is not surprising that the “activities” theme was the most robust in this study. Fathers reported that they skied, hiked, biked, kayaked, coached, cooked, did art, and made jewelry with their children. Neither gender nor age seemed to influence the activities these fathers engaged in. As Bobby reported, “I dragged her all over Mary Jane and made her ski black bumps with me (laughs) at eight.” And as Mitch said, “... they love to draw, I love to draw so we sit, we could spend an hour easily just sitting at the kitchen table just drawing.”

Mike was a self-identified “solution-oriented” father. Whether it was teaching his daughter to find solutions, or creating solutions himself to some of his parenting challenges,

... well I used to respond to problems by doing things, right, so you know, money’s low, I’ll get a job, or and now what I’ve learned is she has to do things, it’s her life, she’s the one, I can’t go in like a helicopter and you know shoot down the combatants and then throw her a rope and rescue her, she has to do that and face it, but what I can do is I can listen, and I can maybe give her an example or a similar situation I’ve had, sometimes I make them up and then, it still works, I just make them up, and then ah, leave her... [Mike]

### **Emotional Well-Being**

Pruett (1987) wrote that divorced fathering frequently starts out negatively as the experience of being separated from one’s children can be numbing, is often bitter, and reflects shock and sadness on the part of both fathers and their children (p. 260). Dudley (1996) also found that fathers experienced considerable emotional distress and struggled to adjust after their marriages ended. The findings of this study were congruent with these

findings. Fathers in this study reflected on what I characterized as their “bad period,” a period of time immediately prior to and after the divorce where their ability to be there, to be engaged, to nurture their children, was negatively impacted by the emotions and reactions to the various losses inherent to the divorce. As Chase noted, “I was always depressed.” Bryce’s feelings were even more intense, he noted that he felt like he was “spiraling out of control like somebody threw me out of an airplane and I didn’t know if I had a chute or not.”

However, Dudley (1996) wrote that fathers who were more closely bonded to their children prior to divorce, who were more active fathers during their marriage, had greater difficulty adjusting to their parenting role post-divorce and were more likely to withdraw from the father-child relationship. The results of this study did not support this finding. The experiences of this study’s participants were different, the opposite. Numerous fathers expressed close bonds with their children during the marriage and a continuation of those bonds, or a fight to regain them, after the divorce. According to Bryce, “... we were so bonded together from early birth to his you know through his first seven years ... we were like two peas in a pod ...”. As Bryce further said, “yeah, I’m not giving up, it’s eight years later, I’m still fighting, you know, I’m not going away.”

This study’s findings did support, however, another finding by Dudley (1996) that the loss of their children was a serious loss to the fathers. Most of the fathers reported feeling a loss with regard to their children, post-divorce. Dudley commented that many fathers “portrayed a façade of being in control of their lives by denying or hiding their feelings” (p. 415). Bryce reported exactly this experience. He reflected on how

you really just don’t know who you are anymore ... and they see that in you ... you don’t know who you are and they don’t know who they are,

and ... the pain that it created in me was always something you had to hide ... [Bryce]

Both Mike and Mitch also reflected on how bad the period was post-divorce and how this affected their ability to nurture their children. For Mike, he felt that he was probably the worst he had ever been as a father immediately following the divorce. Mitch observed that it was a “horrible experience” and “devastating” to witness the impact of divorce on his children and not know what to do to fix things.

As far back as 1980, Friedman was writing that divorce could result in a “positive adaptational experience” (p. 1177) for fathers, something that he also noted was not focused upon in research. Friedman’s (1980) study found that chronic marital tension could disturb the father-child relationship, and when that relationship is terminated, fathers often have an opportunity to engage in more direct nurturing. The findings of this study are congruent with Friedman’s prediction. For the most part, the fathers in this study felt that their nurturing was the same or better than it had been during the marriage. For example, Mike believes that he spends more time now thinking about his daughter, something he really did not do a lot of when he was married. Mitch reflected on his belief that having gone through the divorce “... it’s given me the ability to really realize that how important it is to be there for the kids.” Many of the participants expressed joy in their efforts of “learning” to be a dad post-divorce, which implies that the full range of their parenting desires and skills were not employed during their marriages.

#### Researcher Assumptions and Biases

Moustakas (1994) believes that personal significance to the researcher is a critical element of phenomenology and that one’s research question grows out of “an intense interest in a particular problem or topic” (p. 104). My own experience led to

considerable excitement and curiosity about this topic (Moustakas, 1994). My own experiences undoubtedly contributed to the lens through which I viewed this proposed research. I was fully aware that my values and biases were present as I undertook this project (Creswell, 2007, p. 17). In order to decrease any interference my bias might have contributed to the project, I engaged in self-reflection, reflecting upon biases, thoughts, and perceptions so that they did not interfere with the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Interestingly, I found that my intense feelings about fathers engaged in high-conflict divorces and their subsequent relationships with their children did not become an issue during this process. Instead, these feelings seemed to recede, as I allowed myself to “enjoy” the stories of the research participants and to enjoy the research process. This might have been due in part to the fact that the participants in this study experienced a range of divorce situations, not just negative or high conflict situations. In a sense, the research gave me hope.

### Limitations

As is to be expected, there were some limitations to this project. It was much more difficult to find research participants than was originally anticipated, especially after the scope was narrowed to fathers whose divorce was granted in Colorado (I had numerous contacts in another western state who had agreed to participate). A request for participants was circulated via a professional counseling organization as well as a posting on Craigslist. I sent a personal email to a list of contacts I have developed over time with people in the “divorce industry” and also solicited assistance from my various editing clients. In the end, however, I received only a few referrals from each of the sources and

the referrals did not result in participants. It is my belief that the topic is so emotionally-laden that even fathers who supported the idea of my research and who initially wanted to help by participating, ultimately declined because they did not want to “open old wounds.”

Another limitation was the lack of diversity in participants with regard to race, ethnicity, and/or cultural backgrounds. Despite my best efforts to reach out to diverse participants, the response was even less fruitful than the call for participants in general. This lack of diversity limits the richness of the fathers’ voices around the experience of nurturing.

### Clinical Implications

Phenomenological research can also inform recommendations for improved practice, particularly in the areas of health and counseling psychology. (Willig, 2008, p. 64)

At the completion of this research, my sense is that the experience of nurturing one’s children post-divorce is fraught with obstacles; it is an undertaking that requires considerable commitment and perseverance. Mental health practitioners can serve as a resource to fathers who are attempting to maintain their nurturing relationship with their children post-divorce.

Dowd (2000) found that being a father positively contributes to the development of emotional skills and can possibly help men manage what is frequently the negative outfall of divorce—emotional stress, anger, avoidance, and lack of communication. The findings of this study reflect Dowd’s findings and thus have implications for clinical work with fathers who desire to maintain positive relationships with their children both during and after divorce. Understanding the depth to which nurturing is a positive



experience for fathers, understanding fathers' desires to be there for their children, and understanding how the father-child relationship can actually improve post-divorce, will help clinicians develop interventions and support strategies for clients who are divorced fathers. Key, of course, will be ensuring that fathers seek the mental health assistance they might need.

Support and intervention can occur at different points in the therapeutic relationship and at different points in the divorce process. The needs of fathers just beginning the process might be different than the needs that arise later in the process or they might be compounded. As was identified in this research, and in the literature, fathers experience profound grief and loss as part of the divorce process. Such grief and loss may present in different ways, for example, as depression or anger. Such grief and loss may also interfere with the manner in which fathers stay connected to their children. Helping fathers to process the grief and loss and to find a means to stay connected with their children would be valuable clinical work.

Clinicians can also support clients by helping fathers to develop alternative understandings of fathers as nurturers, moving beyond many of the stereotypes that still exist; particularly that nurturing is a feminine role. Clinicians can help to reinforce or support the nurturing role as a gender-neutral role; not only is nurturing not a feminine role, it is not practiced only by mothers. Helping fathers to embrace their full-potential as parents would be valuable clinical work.

It is also important for clinicians to recognize that fathers experience *being there* for their children differently. Whereas in some cases, *being there* is positive and rewarding for the father, in others cases, the on-going but constrained relationship might

result in on-going exposure to grief and loss. *Being there* may not be as simple as it sounds and the manner by which clinicians help their clients must reflect differences.

This study's findings revealed that for these fathers, having a relationship with their children was "good" for them, healthy for them. Clinicians can draw on this potential strength to help fathers as they struggle with many of the mental health issues associated with divorce. They can draw on this knowledge to help fathers "stick with" their children after the divorce, even when the going "gets tough." Clinicians must have the ability to be supportive of the father as he makes the transition to divorced father.

### Closing Reflections

You have never seen a bigger pain in the ass than the father who wants to get involved; he can be repulsive. He wants to meet the kid after school at three o'clock, take the kid out to dinner during the week, have the kid on his own birthday, talk to the kid on the phone every evening, go to every open school night, take the kid away for the whole weekend so they can be alone together. This type of involved father is pathological.

Judge Richard Huttner (Pruett, 1987, p. 264)

It has been 25 years since Judge Huttner uttered his belief that fathers who want to be involved with their children are pathological. I would like to think that the court system has evolved since that time; my experience has been that progress has been slow. It is for that reason, the slow progress, that I have undertaken this research project as the first step in a larger effort to address the social injustices many fathers face post-divorce.

This research project was exciting for me from beginning to end. At the completion of each interview I was often emotionally "spent"; marveling at the beauty and poignancy of the fathering stories I was allowed to share. Although laughter was most common, there were also moments when I was moved to tears and had to scramble to conceal my emotions.

The research at times felt like a moving target, which was challenging. There would be moments of clarity, I knew exactly what my topic was and what I was trying to accomplish [or so I thought], and then these moments would be gone, in the blink of an eye.

The most significant moment came, however, when I moved toward a deeper analysis of the data, as is discussed in detail in Smith et al. (2009). Prior to that step, I had happily coded my transcripts in a methodical and structured way, creating “logical” themes. The themes provided a framework within which the fathers’ experiences could be group. The result was very descriptive.

The fathers’ experiences really came to life, however, when I applied fresh eyes to the data; when I moved into a deeper, more interpretive, phase. This was not easy to do, physically or intellectually; it taxed my brain. I was facing at least a ream’s worth of transcripts, double-sided, that I had already read, twice, and marked up in orange ink (never red!). I could only work/write in short spurts, returning again and again after allowing time for my thoughts to “mature.”

As a result, however, I began to move away from the “superficial and purely descriptive” (Smith, et al., 2009) towards a more interpretative exploration of the data. Once I started to do this a whole new layer of meaning and understanding began to emerge. Whereas *being there* was an obvious thread that ran through the post-divorce nurturing experience, *being there* was not a single “thing.” The meaning of *being there* varied from father to father. So even if the “essence” of nurturing post-divorce is “being there,” being there is changeable, and experienced differently by every divorced father.

At the end of this process, I feel hopeful and frustrated at the same time. I believe that my own knowledge and understanding of fathers and their commitment to their children has greater depth, breadth, and strength. I also know, from personal experience, that there is much work to be done if I am to successfully convey my understanding, this rich knowledge, to the existing systems and processes within which fathers must parent post-divorce. A recent personal experience brought home, hard, the sense of loss many fathers must feel when divorce institutionally restricts access to their children. In this same recent experience, I witnessed again how difficult it is to convey to the decision-makers the intense desire to parent one's child; that a willingness to do whatever it takes to *be there* for one's children is not pathological, as Judge Huttner believed it was.

It is interesting that 15 years later, despite some progress, there are still many of the same problems as identified in Dudley's 1996 article. There is still a lot of work to be done; this study is but a first step. What is important about this first step is that these findings reflect the actual voices of the fathers themselves; voices that have frequently been left out of the equation in the study of parenting and divorce.

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## APPENDIX A:

### DATA ANALYSIS “CODE BOOK” (INITIAL THEMES AND DESCRIPTIONS)

<b>CODE<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>WHO<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION</b>
Acknowledge	Mitch	References to fathers’ efforts to acknowledge their children; to let their children know that they’re thinking of them, that they “hear” them, etc.
Activities	Bobby	Literally, what the Dads and their kids do together.
Available	Mike	References to “being available” for their children; might logically combine with “being there.”
Before vs. After	Bobby	Responses in direct response to the interview question asking participant to compare is parenting before the divorce with his parenting after the divorce.
“Being there”	Tom	References to “being there” for their children; might logically combine with being “available.” Might it also be “code” for nurturing?
Brief “bad period”	Tom	References to a period of time, usually during or immediately following the divorce that the dads felt they weren’t at their best and fully available to their children.
“Dad” Job Description	Bryce	Applied to passage that seem to enumerate what the participant sees as his “job” as a father.
Description/Adjectives	Bobby	Words or phrases that describe some aspect of the fathering experience. Might be how they describe their child, or how they describe their activities, but mostly trying to capture the tone/voice/qualities of their stories. What does a

<sup>1</sup> Identifying words, phrases, passages, concepts, ideas, major ideas, initial thoughts, observations, associations, questions, summary statements, descriptive labels and whatever else stood out when reading the transcripts. A sort of a modified “theme” approach (Saldana, 2009; Willig, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Themes are alphabetized. The “Who” category reflects the participant in whose transcript the concept first emerged for me. If the theme emerged two, three, four, etc., more interviews into the process, I would return to the earlier interviews and look for the same or a similar theme (Willig, 2008).

CODE <sup>1</sup>	WHO <sup>2</sup>	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
		father “sound” like when talking about fathering? Will generally overlap with other codes.
Discipline	Mitch	Passages that refer to disciplining the children.
Emotions – Child	Bobby	Passages reflecting how the child(ren) feels. How they express emotion, etc.
Emotions – Dad	Bobby	Passages reflecting how the father feels. How they express emotion, etc. This might later be broken down into “good” and “bad” feelings and emotions.
Engagement with Child (i.e., activities, emotionally—list will/ may grow)	Bobby	More than just listing the activities father and child engage in, this code is applied to passages that demonstrate a greater involvement/engagement/ connection between dad and child. Key here is “with the child” as opposed to “towards the child” (see nurturing).
Encourage	Chase	Encouraging child in positive ways, to succeed, to try, etc.
Expected Roles/Stereotypes	Bobby	Passages that reflect commonly held role expectations/ stereotypes that are in keeping with my own/society/ culture’s expectations and stereotypes. But also noting passages with the participants act in contrast to these expectations and stereotypes.
External life	Mitch	References to things that the children do outside the family; references to outside influences.
Feelings About Being a Dad	Bobby	Generally responses to the interview question of “how do you feel about...”. Ultimately might break this down into “good feelings” and “bad feelings.”
“Fighting” to be a Dad	Bryce	Also, this category might get “bumped up” to a broader category that captures the “experience” and then again into “the essence.” Applied to examples of when the father felt he had to “fight” to continue to parent his children. Generally will include references to the court system and likely will co-exist with the system/institutional code.
Financial Responsibility	Chase	Acknowledging dad’s financial responsibility towards child, i.e. child support.
Future-focused	Mike	References to plans for their children’s future.
“Girls need their dads”	Tom	References to the fact that fathers are an important element of a young girl’s emotional growth and development.
“Learning” to be a Dad	Bobby	Passages that refer to literally taking parenting

CODE <sup>1</sup>	WHO <sup>2</sup>	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
		classes or the participant's own expression of having to learn how to do certain things relative to parenting his children.
Listen	Mike	References to the act of listening to their children
Metaphors	Bobby	Used to describe relationships, feelings, experiences, etc.
Not making the same mistakes	Bobby	References to how the participants wanted to help their kids not make the same mistakes they did.
"Nurturing" Behavior	Bobby	Based loosely on the interview questions, which are based on the construct of "nurturing" as defined through the literature review. The definition is not exhaustive or exclusive. The distinction between "engagement" and nurturing in this list of codes is that engagement relates to "with" the child and nurturing relates to "towards" the child. That's my own distinction.
Obstacles to Parenting	Bryce	Applied to passages in which the participant expresses ways in which his parenting is interfered with (whether by mother or the system/institutions).
Parenting "Community"	Mike	Referring to the experience of parenting/fathering in the larger social context, not just between father and child.
Parenting Terms	Bobby	Terms used to describe themselves as dads, i.e., Disneyland Dad, every-other-weekend-dad
Parenting Time/Described	Bobby	Generally, the actual chronological time frame that Dad and kids spend together, i.e. six hours a day, every other weekend, etc. Am also noting when participants reflect on the time they don't spend with their children.
Physical Affection	Mitch	References to demonstrating physical affection towards their children.
Physical Care	Bobby	Care for the child's physical needs, particularly when they are ill or injured.
Recreating/Rebuild/Create Parent Role	Bryce	For those parenting relationships that were interrupted, this code applies to passages that describe how the father has worked to rebuild/recreate his connection with his children. Might also apply to a father whose post-divorce fathering behavior/role is very different than his pre-divorce behavior/role.
Relationship with Child(ren)	Bobby	When father describes his relationship with his children.
Ritual (as different than routine?)	Tom	Something special that the fathers and children do together. Not sure if in the end this will be

CODE <sup>1</sup>	WHO <sup>2</sup>	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
Schedule/Routine	Mike	different from routine; it feels that way initially, similar but not exactly the same. References to establishing/re-establishing one with children; or not as the case may be. Might be references to a “parenting schedule,” which might also fall under system/institution. In the end, this code might merge with or be absorbed by “activities”
Self-assessment	Bobby	Looking back, reflecting, “woulda, coulda, shoulda” kind of statements.
Step-parents	Bobby	References to other parents or other people in the child’s life, particularly step-fathers, who have some real or perceived role in the raising of the child. Might apply to references about participant’s feelings towards this person, or to references about what sort of effect this person has on the participant’s own relationship with their child.
System/Institutions	Bobby	Recording when references are made to the state, family court, divorce proceedings, lawyers, service providers, public institutions (i.e. family services, supervised visitation, schools). References to when these outside parties somehow impact parenting. Might also including references to “parenting schedules.”
Teaching About Life	Bobby	Passages referring to ways in which the participant “teaches” his children about life.
“That’s life”	Mike	This comes from Doucet, sort of the perspective that fathers nurture in such a way as to kind of let kids figure it out, to take risks, to fail, to not always come rushing in to protect them. Don’t know if I’ll keep this code; most certainly will refine it.
Thinking about the child	Mike	When the father’s not with his children, he’s thinking about them.
“What’s Missing”	Bobby	References to what the participant feels isn’t happening in his relationship with his children, or to what he’s missing in his children’s lives.

# APPENDIX B:

## SUMMARY OF CODES AS REFERENCED BY PARTICIPANT

Theme	Participant						
	Bobby	Bryce	Chase	Jason	Mike	Mitch	Tom
Activities	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Before Vs. After	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Bad Period	•	•	•		•		•
Being There/Nurturing/ Engaged/Available	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Feelings About Being Dad	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Learning To Be A Dad	•	•			•	•	•
Parenting Time	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Self-Assessment	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Stereotypes /Roles	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Emotion – Child	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Emotion – Dad	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
“Dad” Job Description	•	•	•	•	•		•
Obstacles	•	•				•	
Teaching About Life/Not Making Same Mistakes	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Parent “Titles”	•	•			•	•	
Thinking About Child/What’s Missing	•			•	•	•	
Relationship W/Child	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Institutions /Systems	•	•		•	•	•	
Routine /Ritual	•	•		•		•	•
Listening				•	•	•	•
Recreate /Rebond		•			•	•	
Step Parent	•	•		•	•		•

## APPENDIX C:

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS TO PARTICIPATE

Date

Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Lynda Kemp and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University. Dr. Sharon Anderson, Associate Professor in the School of Education, is my advisor who is guiding me in this research study. As a researcher and mental health counselor, I am seeking to explore and to understand the lived experiences of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce.

Children and mothers have traditionally been the focus of research on well-being post-divorce, with only limited attention paid to the issues that fathers face following a divorce, many of which are distressing. Some believe that fathering research has been too narrow and that greater attention needs to be directed towards a more complete understanding of fatherhood and father involvement, including assessing the quality of fathers' relationships with their children. Fathering researchers have also noted that much of the research *on fathering* is actually based on mother reports, or what is known as a "mother bias." Therefore, it is my hope to access fathers' voices on this important topic.

My dissertation, titled FATHERS NURTURING THEIR CHILDREN POST-DIVORCE FROM THE FATHERS' PERSPECTIVE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION will use in-depth interviews. My study is focused specifically on nurturing because it was element of fathering that stands to be significantly impacted when fathers are afforded less time with their children due to divorce. Nurturing has been defined as behaviors that provide physical or psychological nourishment. Nurturing behaviors are also those behaviors that are appropriately responsive to the emotional needs, personal rhythms, and developmental stages of the child. A nurturing parent has been described as a parent who is sensitive to their children's emotional needs, communicates well with their children, is supportive in times of stress, and is knowledgeable and interested in their children's activities. Behaviors such as touching, carrying, hugging, kissing, other contact, talking, and feeding, or simply physical affection, verbal affection, teaching a skill, and playing with one's children are considered nurturing. Essentially, nurturing implies engagement.



As the principal researcher for this study, I invite you participate. The information received from the interviews will be extremely useful to the body of knowledge of around fathering, parenting, parenting post-divorce, the court systems, and counseling.

For your review, I have attached a copy of the preliminary interview questions and the consent form. The interview questions will offer a window to the type of questions that I will be seeking to explore. The consent form has all of the pertinent information regarding this research study. Please be aware that all of the information you provide is confidential. Also, your identity will not be disclosed in any written work as a result of this research study. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research study. I will, however, make available referrals for mental health professionals (counselors, psychologists, social workers) if as a result of participating you feel a need for additional information or support.

I will follow-up with a telephone call in one week to answer your questions and accept your participation to participate in this study. The interviews will be audio-taped and will be between 60 and 90 minutes for the first interview and any follow-up interviews will be approximately 30 minutes. If you are willing to participate, we can mutually determine a date, time, and location for the first interview; any subsequent interviews can be conducted via telephone at a mutually agreeable time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. I can be reached by calling (303) 995-6530 (cell). I really appreciate your time and consideration regarding my research study. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, please contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655. Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Lynda Kemp  
*Doctoral Candidate*  
School of Education  
Colorado State University

Dr. Sharon Anderson  
Associate Professor, School of Education  
Colorado State University

APPENDIX D:

SAMPLE INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

**Project Title:** Fathers Nurturing Their Children Post-Divorce From The Fathers' Perspective: A Phenomenological Exploration

**Name of Principal Investigator:** Dr. Sharon Anderson, PhD., Associate Professor, School of Education, Colorado State University

**Name of Co-Investigator:** Lynda Kemp, School of Education, Colorado State University

**Committee members:** John Littrell, PhD, Kimberly Bundy-Fazioli, PhD, and Louise Jennings, PhD

**Contact Name and Phone Number for Questions/Problems:** Lynda Kemp 303-995-6530 (cell)

**Purpose of Research:** This study will use interviews to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of fathers nurturing their children post-divorce.

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences as a father nurturing his children post-divorce. The interview will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes with a possible 30 minute follow-up interview. Notes will be taken and the interviews will be audio-taped. Audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the research project. All materials will be indexed by case number and only pseudonyms will be used. The co-investigator will have the tapes transcribed, which will be sent to you for review.

**Risk inherent in the procedures:** There are no known risks. However, it is not possible to identify all potential risk in research procedure, but the researcher(s) have taken every reasonable precaution to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks to participants of this study. The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Page \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_ Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Benefits:** There are not any known benefits associated for the participants, however, the participants sharing their experiences may be helpful to the body of knowledge around fathering, parenting, parenting post-divorce, the courts, and mental health practitioners.

**Confidentiality:** Individual, institutional, region and state identity associated with your interview will not be used to in any reports generated by the study. Quotes will be used in the study to support themes. Quotes from the study will not be used in association with any identified persons, state, or institutions. We will keep all research records that identify you confidential, to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep you name and other identifying information confidential. All interview data will be stored in a safe location. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. Because of the nature of this study, and my position as a psychotherapist registered in the State of Colorado, there are some exceptions to confidentiality, as follows:

- i) I am required to report any suspected incident of child abuse or neglect to law enforcement;
- ii) I am required to report any threat of imminent physical harm by a client to law enforcement and to the person(s) threatened;
- iii) I am required to initiate a mental health evaluation of a client who is imminently dangerous to self or to others or who is gravely disabled, as a result of a mental disorder; and

**Compensation:** There will be no compensation for participation in this research study.

**Liability:** Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Your participation is voluntary. Therefore, if you decide to withdrawn you may do so without loss of benefits or penalty.

**Questions of Inquiry:** Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the co-investigator, Lynda Kemp at 303-995-6530. Questions about rights of participants should be directed at: Human Subject's personnel. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

Page \_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_ Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on \_\_\_\_\_.**

Your signature below acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Participant's name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Research Staff: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E:

INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Fathers Nurturing Their Children Post-Divorce: The Fathers' Perspective**

**SECTION I:**

**Demographic information (please circle one of the following for each category):**

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_
2. What was your age when you were married? \_\_\_\_
3. How many years were you married? \_\_\_\_
4. How long have you been divorced? \_\_\_\_
5. How many children did you father full-time as part of your former marriage? \_\_\_\_  
(biological/adoptive/step)
6. How old were your children when you divorced? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How old are your children now: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Were your children born: \_\_\_\_before/ \_\_\_\_ during/ or \_\_\_\_ after the marriage?
9. On average, how much time do you spend with your child/children? (Please choose the most relevant measure.)  
\_\_\_\_ hrs/wk    \_\_\_\_ days/wk (24 hr days)    \_\_\_\_ days/month    \_\_\_\_ no time
10. On average, how frequently do you have contact with your child/children via phone/email/other? (i.e., once a day/multiple times a day/once a week/multiple times a week/occasionally/never) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Is your time with your children \_\_\_\_ unsupervised? \_\_\_\_ supervised?
12. Are you currently employed? \_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_ no
- If yes, full time or part time? \_\_\_\_ FT \_\_\_\_PT
13. If no, how long have you been unemployed? \_\_\_\_ days/weeks/months/years
14. What is your current relationship status?
15. \_\_\_\_ single      \_\_\_\_ dating      \_\_\_\_ in a committed relationship
- \_\_\_\_ remarried w/o children      \_\_\_\_ remarried with new children (step or biological)

## **SECTION II:**

### **Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe your relationship with your children post-divorce.  
(Probes might include: What do you do with your children on weekdays? Weekends? Describe your family meals? Do you attend school events? Sporting events? What might a typical parenting time look like?)
  - Describe how you respond to your children's emotional needs?
  - Describe how you support your children during difficult periods/periods of stress?
  - Describe how you care for your children when they are ill/injured.
  - Describe your knowledge of and interest in your children's activities.
  - Describe your involvement in your children's activities.
2. How is this similar/different than when you were married/living with your family?
3. Do you believe you are more, the same, or less nurturing with your children since your divorce?
4. Describe how you feel about nurturing your children post-divorce? What adjectives would you use to describe your experience? Is there a metaphor that captures your experience?